# Performance art, liturgy and the performance of belief

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# PERFORMANCE ART, LITURGY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF BELIEF

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# ABSTRACT

The history of art and religion is intricately linked in Western culture. This thesis focuses on one strand of this relationship and is concerned with the role of performance practices in relation to spirituality in the West. Contemporary performance practice and theory are at the centre of this research. Case studies on the Roman Catholic Liturgy and the performance artist Marina Abramović are used to show how traditional analyses of spiritual performance have not accounted for the effects and affects of metaphysics in how we understand belief. I argue that examinations of spiritual performance are needed which do not try to understand such performances in terms of their representative meaning, but rather, seek to account for their performative qualities as practices that both instantiate and manifest belief. Performative theory has been used extensively to analyse language and human action, specifically the performance of gender. Here belief is taken as the subject of performative action and rituals are examined as performance practices which perform belief. Starting with Jacques Derrida, I begin a discussion of metaphysics and representation, tracing the nature of Western understandings of belief from Plato, to Friedrich Nietzsche, to Derrida, and to contemporary theological investigations into the nature of the human soul. This establishes the metaphysical history of the treatment of belief as well as various theoretical attempts to move past this model. The work of J.L. Austin, John R. Searle, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood is employed to examine belief through speech act theory as a verb and finally through performative theory as an action. The first half of the thesis contextualises Western belief as a culturally specific entity that has not been analysed or understood in relation to its physical and material aspects, as well as developing an analysis of performative action. The second half applies the performative approach to the case studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The interplay of metaphysics, Christianity, belief and material practices is misunderstood. Western critical discourses around belief demonstrate a strong tendency to conceive of belief, including, and most particularly, Christian belief in relation to transcendence. Conceptions of the material practices of belief tend towards the metaphysical. To demonstrate this claim and start to fill the disciplinary gaps that contribute to this misunderstanding, this thesis undertakes an examination of belief across disciplines, and grounds the findings in a performative reading of the physical and material[1] practices of both the Roman Catholic liturgy and the performance art of Marina Abramović. I argue that it is necessary to re-examine belief through a variety of disciplines and establish a framework through which bodily practices will be given serious consideration as part of how we understand belief. Belief is traditionally analysed representationally and here we will look at how it can also be analysed performatively: the performative is interested in what happens, whereas, the representational focuses on possible meanings of that which happens. It is through treating belief as performative that we will see embodied[2] practices as

[1] These two terms are problematic because what is really needed is a word that describes and encompasses the entire body/mind/spirit/soul. All sorts of terms have been used to divide the human experience and part of what I am aiming to articulate in this thesis is the realm of experience that is embodied (see definition below) and difficult to put into words. This is experienced through all the senses and thus through the body, but it is not limited to the 'body' in a strict sense where body is divided from mind and spirit/soul. Instead the body is understood as a totality, a unified whole instead of a set of parts. Above, I have used the terms physical and material to cover all the experiences that can happen during the liturgy or a performance piece. By physical I mean those experiences that are available with and through the senses and perception, and by material I mean those experiences available through interaction with objects, with the tangible world. For lack of an overarching term that covers all of what is apprehended through the use of the senses and the 'body' I will use the word 'body' to mean the totality of the person. I use physical and material as a way to account for all that the totality of the person comes into contact with.

[2] The term embodied is used extensively in performance studies to talk about practices that express ideas through physical forms. These might highlight practices that involve all the senses and a deep awareness of the self in response to the senses. It has been used as the opposite to approaches that emphasise only cognitive thought as a way to explain or find meaning. Among

relevant to academic study in both performance studies and theology. It is through this perspective on religious ritual and performance art that a fuller picture of religious and spiritual performance practices emerges. Performative analysis allows for actions and objects to be examined in relation to the moment of performance instead of only one part of a broader representative analysis. I show how traditional analyses of spiritual performance have not accounted for the effects and affects of metaphysics in how we understand belief. Examinations of spiritual performance are needed which do not try to understand such performances in terms of their representative meaning, but rather, seek to account for their performative qualities as practices that instantiate, and manifest belief. To support this position I offer a reading of belief through its treatment across the fields of philosophy, theology, religious studies, anthropology and performance studies, in order to show the necessity of taking these influences into account in examinations of ritual and performance art. Ultimately this thesis looks to expose inherent structures that shape conceptions of belief and open up the potential of understanding belief as performative for performance studies as well as other fields that analyse religious/spiritual[3] practices.

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theorists who have done extensive work on this are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Connerton and Mary Douglas. This idea that belief can be part of an embodied practice is linked to the work of both performance scholars and philosophers who are interested in the performative and in physical practices. Paul Connerton explains embodied practice: "It is through the essentially embodied nature of our social existence, and through the incorporated practices based upon these embodyings, that these oppositional terms provide us with metaphors by which we think and live." Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 74. Connerton uses the term "incorporating practice" to discuss conscious behaviour, that is spatially located, and framed by social and communal structures. Thus, the "incorporating practice" performs embodied knowledge in real time (p. 73). These theories are valuable in the study of performance practices because, as Aaron Turner explains, "[e]mbodiment seems to shift the study of society and culture to an examination of processes at work in everyday experience and interaction" Aaron Turner, 'Embodied ethnography. Doing culture', *Social Anthropology*, 8 (2000), 51–60 (p. 53).

[3] Throughout the dissertation I refer to both overtly religious practices, i.e. liturgy, and also spiritual practices, i.e. "human practice that maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the individual manipulation of symbolic systems." Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence of New Age Religion: On the

This dissertation is positioned after the poststructuralist attacks on metaphysics and is allied with Derrida's interest in, and reading of, the history of metaphysical thought. Taking my cue from Derrida, who carried out the most sustained attempt in the twentieth century to unpick the foundations of Western thought, I turn to his influences in philosophy and theatre in my own survey of writing on metaphysics. Specifically, my examinations of Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche are indebted to Derrida's theories. I do not attempt an historical investigation of metaphysical thinking, but rather a thematic one that focuses on the disruption of metaphysical structures. Derrida identifies Plato as the most crucial of Greek thinkers in relation to metaphysics, and engages with Plato's writing to ground his own development of deconstruction, perhaps most clearly in his piece 'Plato's Pharmacy.'[4] The jump from Plato to Nietzsche is a large one through time, but Nietzsche's work repositions Plato in line with the advent of modernity. It is also through Nietzsche that Derrida comments on much of Plato's influence. Nietzsche is often credited with setting the foundation necessary for poststructuralist theories; a tradition in which Derrida figures prominently.[5] Most importantly for this dissertation, Nietzsche, as the most famous atheist and critic of Christianity, unites an attack on Christianity with an attack on metaphysics demonstrating the connection between the two. In the second half of the Introduction I discuss Derrida's writing on Antonin Artaud. It is here that Derrida

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substance of ghosts and the use of concepts', *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*, 1 (2005), 35-58 (p. 42). I try to use either religion or spirituality to avoid constantly repeating them both. My use of one does not discount the potential for a participant to think of their practice as either term. In Chapter 4 I do provide a discussion of the differences between religions and spiritualities. However, there will always be slight nuances that are associated with one word or the other that are not accounted for in any one definition. Spirituality in this application is thus the combination of knowledge and practices associated with meta-empirical frameworks.

[4] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 67-186.

[5] See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act* (London, Routledge, 1983), pp. 13, 103, 114.

links Plato, Nietzsche, metaphysics, theatre, the spiritual, and the problems of representation.

This thesis evolved out of research in performance studies that led to an interest in the performative utterance 'I believe.' The idea that belief was performed proved profitable and developed to include the question of how analyses of belief in performance could take into account performative action. The criticisms of spiritual performance practices that I read rarely addressed belief. They were frequently focused on representative analyses that drew on Eastern spiritual practices to explain the actions in the piece. I found these unsatisfactory and they contributed to my concern that there was a lack of research into Western spiritual practices by performance scholars. The potential ability of Western tradition to inform Western performance practices was unrecognized. Research into the problem revealed that interest in this area was spread over multiple fields but that little communication was happening between the disciplines. From liturgical theology and religious studies to anthropology, ethnography, ritual studies, philosophy, critical theory, theatre theory and performance studies, each area had developed their own accounts of Western performance practices, and their own analyses of the spiritual. Yet, connections exist between all of these fields, both historically and methodologically.

My work is part of the discipline of performance studies, and I want to clarify what I mean by 'performance.' On one level performance is an overarching term that includes all human behaviour, yet it can also be applied to a specific instance of performance involving one performer and one spectator. It is used to discuss societal and cultural performance as well as traditional theatrical presentations. In this dissertation when I refer to performance practices, be they

theatrical, ritual, spiritual, religious or all of the above, I refer to actions undertaken by the performer(s)/participant(s) which effect the performance at hand.[6] Contemporary performance art and performance practices, at least the kinds of performance that started in the 1960s, are usually based on the performer being themselves or alternating between being themselves and a persona. Performance practices such as cultural or religious rituals also understand the participants to participate as themselves, even as they might adopt a role within the performance, e.g. a choir member or lay reader in a Mass. Performance practices do not function in opposition to theatre, but exist alongside traditional theatrical forms.

## Performativity and Theatricality

In this dissertation I use the terms performance, performative and performativity almost to the exclusion of theatre, theatrical and theatricality. The trajectories and developments of these terms are different but their usages do overlap at times. This short section introduces both sets of terms and provides discussions from various theorists about the implications of both. I focus almost exclusively on performance, performative and performativity in my own analysis here because the points of comparison between my two main objects of study arise from their shared concern with performance rather than from any relation either might have to the practice of theatre.

The terms theatre and theatrical are often applied metaphorically, to indicate usually superficial ways in which the presentational aspects of a church

[6] In the case of rituals, such as the Roman Catholic liturgy, those performing might not view their participation as a performance. As well, those who attend a performance by a performance artist might not understand their presence as participation. Yet in both these cases, performance theory includes these people and their actions as part of the analysis of the performance.

service, for example, might resemble theatre.[7] Another typical application is to refer to the use of objects in performance art as theatrical. Discussions that involve the terms theatrical and theatricality, whether in relation to the liturgy or performance art, regularly analyse the action as representational. To insist on the performative, rather than the representation is to focus on what is happening, what transformations may be taking place, which behaviours enacted and re-enacted, rather than what the event resembles, or which absent actions, objects or persons it might represent. Before explaining performative action in more detail I first provide background to the terms theatre, theatrical and theatricality.

As I am not discussing the kind of performances that take place in a theatre the absence of this one term from my discussion is understandable. While liturgy has been compared to theatre, for the purposes of my work, I want to move away from this perspective. Later in the dissertation I explain that the structure of the liturgy more clearly mimics that of performance art, with its facilitator and participants, than the theatre with actors and an audience.

The adjective form – theatrical – as it relates to the overarching event is

[7] In *Sacred Drama* Patricia Wilson-Kastner uses theatre and drama as metaphors for what happens in the liturgy, for example: "Plays do need to be rewritten and people's roles changed. The drama of the liturgy has an established essential plot, but the roles of its participants must always be changing, because human awareness of our relation to God and the world is never complete" (p. 15); and "The liturgy proclaims the judgement of God as hope and mercy for the world, even if that mercy and hope will also require the world's transformation. We don't have all the details of the script. In that regard we are involved in something more like improvisational theatre" (p. 21). Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Sacred Drama: A Spirituality of Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). Kevin J. Vanhoozer also uses theatre metaphorically and as a simile: "What is of special interest in this section, however, is the church's performance of Christ's cross. For here, as perhaps nowhere else, the church achieves its own distinct "A-effect": nothing is more revolutionary, or alienating, than the scandal of the cross. […] The particular A-effects of the church's cruciform performances are two: martyrdom and reconciliation. The church is never more Brechtian than when it proclaims and performs the cross." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 428.

also not as pertinent to the kinds of descriptions I want to articulate. Objects can be used in theatrical ways, but my research in Chapter 2 shows that liturgical objects have already been treated to such a comparison, specifically by theology. Theatricality is finally the one term from the three which is more applicable because it is more complex and relates to theories of presentation which are much less bound to theatre forms, structures and buildings. It also has routinely been applied to a range of non-theatrical social activities. As such, this term in particular deserves explanation.

Interest in theatricality has been positioned historically by Josette Féral as being a recent phenomenon; its use is consonant with a fascination with theorizing itself. The attempt to "conceptualize the notion of theatricality" she argues is part of "recent preoccupations with the theory of theater." [8] While she provides synopses of many views of the theatrical, she chooses to foreground theatricality as, "a process that has to do with a "gaze" that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge."[9] This 'gaze' can originate in either the performer or the spectator and the fiction that results can be apparent to one or many people. If it is the gaze of the performer, then the "space [is] created by the conscious act of the performer, understood here in the largest sense of the word to include the actor, director, designer, lighting director, and architect."[10] Those who plan and execute the performance are thus responsible for creating the 'theatricality,' and the space in which this happens is fundamental, whether it is a theatre building or a public space. Awareness is also primary as the spectator must be able to identify *what* is

[8]Josette Féral, 'Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language', *SubStance* 31 (2002), 94-108 (p. 95). Féral links a specific theoretical interest in theatricality to research in the 1970s.
[9] Féral, p. 97.
[10] Féral, p. 97.

watched as a fictional event created by others.

If it is the gaze of the spectator,

> the spectator's gaze create[s] a spatial cleft from which illusion emerge[s] – illusion whose vehicle the spectator ha[s] selected from among events, behaviors, physical bodies, objects and space without regard for the fictional or real nature of the vehicle's origin.[11]

In this scenario the spectator makes a decision to "inscribes theatricality in the space surrounding him."[12] The events and people who are involved do not choose this theatricality and only the spectator is aware. She summarizes her theory thus:

> theatricality appears to be more than a property; in fact, we might call it a process that recognizes subjects in process; it is a process of looking at or being looked at. It is an act initiated in one of two possible spaces: either that of the actor or that of the spectator. In both cases, this act creates a cleft in the quotidian that becomes the space of the other, the space in which the other has a place. Without such a cleft, the quotidian remains intact, precluding the possibility of theatricality, much less of theater itself.[13]

Now, of course what happens in the liturgy or in a piece of performance art can and does include the act of looking, of establishing a gaze. The gazes in these situations do not include that of an actor in the same way as a piece of theatre, but they do include the spectator in the sense that all the people in the space of a liturgy are watching all the other people in the space. And all the people at the gallery who attend Abramović's performance piece, including the performer, are able to establish a gaze with others.[14] In both of my case studies the point of the gaze is not to create a fictional world. While it could be argued that 'a cleft in the quotidian' is possible, this is not the desired outcome either. We attend a liturgy or a performance piece in a place outside of the quotidian. Their common purpose is not to provide an escape from reality or a cleft in what could be called a

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[11] Féral, p. 97.
[12] Féral, p. 98.
[13] Féral, p. 98.
[14] In Abramović's piece, *The House With the Ocean View*, the establishment of a gaze is essential for the piece itself, and I will return to this in Chapter 4.

theatrical manner, but rather, one might say, to heal clefts in social relations, to make community rather than to cleave it. They are meant to be occasions where the focus is placed on the processes of performing, the collaborative endeavour that constitutes the event, rather than the product.

To follow the same sequence of the discussion of 'theatre,' I use the term performance throughout the dissertation partially because it is a term that I can apply to both the liturgy and performance art.[15] Using 'performance' enables discussions of the actions of the facilitators and participants at any point in the event. Janelle Reinelt has provided a model for understanding these three terms:

> "Performance" has been used to differentiate certain processes of performing from the products of theatrical performance, and in its most narrow usage, to identify performance art as that which, unlike "regular" theatrical performances, stages the subject in process, the making and fashioning of certain materials, especially the body, and the exploration of the limits of representation-ability.[16]

Where 'theatrical' is normally conceived as display, representation, spectacle, distance, and separation, performance is about the process of efficacious actions. The application of the term performance as a way to highlight the process of the performer is one that I draw on throughout the dissertation. I also apply Reinelt's narrow usage to Abramović's work, and to the liturgy, too, in order to draw out the making and fashioning of the materials of performance. I pay specific attention throughout to a discussion of the limits of 'representation-ability' by highlighting the myriad meanings that are present and potential for all those who participate.

Reinelt's second definition includes the wider concept of performance as a field constituted by the broad scope of inquiry now institutionalised as

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[15] Whereas theatre is applicable to neither.

[16] Janelle Reinelt, 'The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality', *SubStance*, 31 (2002), 201-215 (p. 201).

‘performance studies.’ From its beginnings in the 1970s and early 80s this broader view of what constituted performance gave “equal status to rituals, sports, dance, political events, and certain performative aspects of everyday life. [This] [l]inking…enabled a political project of great potential as it developed through the 1970s and 1980s.”[17] The field of performance has thus shaped my own approach and methods. The trajectory begun in the 1970s and 1980s and that has continued to the present day was concerned with “deliberate socio-political analyses” with the aim of “articulating an acute awareness of cultural differences and historical specificities, producing work on race, gender, and sexuality as they are asserted and inscribed in performance: as they become performative.”[18] It is this work that has engendered my interest in exploring belief in terms of academic study. One of the key reasons for conducting such an exploration from within performance studies instead of some other field, such as ritual studies, is that performance studies emphasizes the significance of performance-as-process rather than performance-as-text. As Reinelt explains, this has been an underlying issue in the development of performance studies as a field: “[this] institutional struggle for territory and legitimacy links to a long history of conflict within theater studies between privileging dramatic texts or the processes and events produced in concrete performances.”[19] A similar emphasis on the text may be observed in much study of liturgy.[20]

Reinelt’s third focus is on the philosophical usage of performativity. In Chapter 1, I draw on her references to the work of J.L. Austin who coined the term performative as part of his work as a linguistic theorist. His work has been

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[17] Reinelt, p. 202.
[18] Reinelt, p. 202.
[19] Reinelt, p. 203.
[20] Examples of text-based analyses of liturgy from my research can be found in the section on Textual Liturgy in Chapter 2.

developed by prominent writers in linguistic theory, such as John Searle, as well as by critical theory and philosophy, most notably by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler – each of whom I examine in Chapter 1. This philosophical engagement with performativity is "part of an ongoing poststructural critique of agency, subjectivity, language and law."[21]

As Reinelt points out, it is somewhat ironic that Austin's account of performativity has been embraced by performance studies and applied to theatre and performance, since Austin himself specifically excluded theatre from consideration, famously arguing that any apparent performative speech act uttered on stage is 'etiolated.'[22] This line of argumentation has been challenged by Derrida and other philosophers as well as by performance scholars who have linked this 'desire to exclude' back to a more general anti-theatrical prejudice.[23] The role of performance, however, understood as something that takes place both within and beyond the theatre, itself takes precedence over any historical tendency to relegate theatre to the sidelines of philosophy. I am interested, therefore, in specific aspects of performance that have been informed by the emphasis within performance studies on process. As Reinelt explains:

> Performance theory…isolates performative processes in order to subject them to a de-representation and a close scrutiny for lingering traces of the theological stage—the text-dominated, logocentric stage of European

[21] Reinelt, p. 203.
[22] "[A] performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways-intelligibly-used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use-ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances." J.L. Austin, *How to do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 22.
[23] For more on this see Jonas M. Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (London: University of California Press, 1981); Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, 'Introduction', in *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-39; Jacques Derrida argues for the general iterability of all language whether in everyday speech or in theatrical context in his essays 'Signature Event Context' and 'Limited Inc abc …'. Both are found in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

> theater and culture. And by aligning theater studies with other disciplines under the rubric of Cultural Studies, the comparativist work that has emerged opened a political project that made sex, gender, race, and class central analytic categories of the new "performance studies."[24]

My work is indebted to this larger project: while my own concerns are not with the performative dimensions of 'sex, gender, race and class', such considerations have motivated my interest in exploring the performative dimensions of belief.

At this point it should be clear that my decision to use performativity instead of theatricality is driven both by my disciplinary influences and the specifics of my research focus. Another way of putting this is to say that I constitute the objects of my research in terms of performance. Another dissertation might undertake a discussion of the operations, in either liturgy or performance art, of a theatrical gaze "that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge."[25] The foundation of this thesis in the study of performance and my approach to the topic is interdisciplinary with the main secondary disciplinary engagement being that of theology. This will be clarified in the following outline of the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 has three distinct sections. In the first I examine metaphysics through the perspective of Derrida's writings, starting with Plato – investigating the problem of salvation in relation to both Greek thought and Christianity – and then move on to Nietzsche, Derrida and Nancey Murphy (a contemporary theologian who argues for a holistic understanding of the body and soul together as a 'God breathed' unity). These theorists take into account important criticisms of metaphysical dualism and its effect on the concept of salvation. The second

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[24] Reinelt, p. 205.
[25] Féral, p. 97.

section picks up the problem of language. Through an examination of the noun and verb 'belief' and 'believe,' with emphasis on the work of Malcolm Ruel and Jean Pouillon, I explain the impact of the word on philosophical and theological structures establishing why this is crucial to a discussion of performance practices. The first two sections set the ground work for the last section on performativity where I trace the development of conceptions of the performative from J.L. Austin to John R. Searle to Judith Butler to Saba Mahmood. I contend that it is through a performative reading of belief that the material nature of religious or spiritual performance practices is best addressed.

In Chapter 2, I introduce Christian liturgy as a Western performance form and explain ritual aspects of the Roman Catholic liturgy. Through examples from religious studies I detail the kinds of analyses that have been applied to this practice. This constitutes a literature review and helps me to establish the disciplinary gaps I am filling with my research. Next is a section that details the history of the collaborations that exist between performance studies and anthropology. The advent of performance studies in the 1970s was closely linked to the use and development of anthropological methods for theatre research. Extensive use of these methods has shown their usefulness to the field; however, it has also led to somewhat skewed readings of religious ritual.[26] Since the 1970s performance studies has not prioritized keeping abreast of current developments

[26] As Arne Røkkum explains methods taken for granted by anthropology foreground and reinforce Western modes of thinking and analysing the world even while attempting to allow the 'other' a unique and authentic voice: "At the present time, a generalization with discipline-wide import seems to be this: whereas Western worldviews subsist on a Cartesian premise of a split between mind and body, the non-Western worldviews lack this philosophically authored discrepancy. Anthropology's specific contribution for dissolving an assumption of a mind-body polarity comes pre-eminently with the less cerebral non-Western alternative, as in the case of knowing oneself as an instance of embodiment. Somewhat paradoxically, then, while accenting the non-Western ways of knowing, we – the anthropologists – may encourage people to sort out their experiences with the crispness of a Cartesian worldview, as their articulations." Arne Røkkum, *Nature, Ritual, and Society in Japan's Ryukyu Islands* (Routledge: London, 2006), p. 1.

in anthropology, which as I discuss, are changing the understanding of the methodologies themselves. One recent strand of anthropological research looks at Christianity in depth and I focus on a reading of anthropological research by Fenella Cannell that situates Christianity as the repressed of anthropology. I show how this information is important to the ongoing project of performance analysis in performance studies. I conclude with a consideration of theories of theatre reception from Helen Freshwater, Gay McAuley and Jacques Rancière.

Chapter 3 is a case study of the Roman Catholic liturgy in the Czech Republic over Easter Week in 2005. I attended seven Masses in two towns during the week while living with a Czech family. My interest in the physicality and materiality of Western practices led me to undertake research for a case study in another country. As I could not rely on language for meaning, the experience demanded that I foreground the event, i.e. what I could observe and understand through physical and material experience and through watching the actions and use of objects around me. Attending Roman Catholic services in the UK would not have provided the same experience. The case study comprises a short history of the development of the Mass, an analysis of meaning-making in the Eucharist, descriptions of what happened over Easter week, and an analysis that foregrounds performative action. I argue that this results in valuable information that would otherwise not be observed. Representational analyses tend to focus on how specific ritual practices conform to supposed norms in order to repeat familiar meanings.

Chapter 4 is the longest and brings together the arguments of the previous three. It centers on a case study of the work of Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović. I begin by introducing a brief history of Christian iconography in

visual art, drawing out the aspects that most link to Abramović's work. This provides a clear connection from the liturgical practices to the artistic performances. I then provide some historical background to Abramović's upbringing and artistic practices. Alongside this history I offer a discussion of the role of performance documentation in the field of performance studies and an examination of two spiritual practices to which Abramović's work is often compared: Shamanism and the New Age. I then describe three of her pieces and conduct a detailed analysis, both comparing them to liturgical action as well as presenting an examination of the performative actions. I conclude by introducing academic and art criticism of her 2002 piece *The House With the Ocean View* and finally, reconnect back to the visual art practices from the beginning of the chapter. These texts enable a close reading of critical discourses around spiritual performance that returns to the linguistic, performative and philosophical arguments from earlier chapters. This project is crucial because of the unseen biases of interpretations of performance practices. At stake is a reorientation of critical processes within the field of performance studies. Throughout Chapter 4 I demonstrate the claims made in the earlier chapters and incorporate the ideas I have already theorized.

The primary question of the dissertation is 'What is the performance of belief?' For the purposes of reading through the first part of Chapter 1, with its discussion of Plato's theory of Forms, and the descriptions of the belief engendered by these theories of transcendence, it is sufficient to rely on standard definitions of belief: a conviction of the truth or reality of something; a tenet or body of tenets held by a group; a state; mental act; or condition or habit of placing of trust in another. Yet, importantly, what unfolds in this dissertation is

the sheer volume of information contained by the concept of belief; it cannot be reduced to a one line definition. The dissertation takes the reader through the nuances of the word and it is the contested nature of the term as a construction of Western culture and religion that comes through. I do not use or discuss 'belief' as shorthand for 'I think' or 'I know,' as in 'I believe he is coming at three o'clock,' or, 'I believe she likes blueberries.' In neither of these cases is the use of the word necessary. It is simply a synonym for 'know' or 'think': 'I think he is coming at three o'clock' and 'I know she likes blueberries.' I am interested in the situations where belief must be used, or, as the case may be, where to use belief becomes potentially problematic, as anthropologist Malcolm Ruel explains: "I stopped using the word 'belief' or 'belief system' or writing about what a people 'believe' in discussing a non-Christian religion."[27] I argue that the word and concepts of belief are specific to Western-Christian traditions.

## Varieties of Belief

Belief is layered, socially specific, difficult to explain in words, and ever shifting depending on the kind of belief at hand. Catherine Bell offers a clear explanation of belief in relation to religion that I think provides a good starting place for any discussion of belief:

> Religious beliefs have been understood in a variety of ways—as pseudoscientific explanations, rationalizations of customary behaviour, personal or communal ideologies, or highly structured doctrinal formulations whose content has little import on behaviour.[28]

Bell's list highlights that there cannot be one understanding of 'belief' because it is applied to a wide array of subjects. By and large the written work that exists on belief falls into a diverse categories. There are academic linguistic accounts that

[27] Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual and the Securing of Life* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), p. 5.
[28] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 182.

use mathematic equations to determine the truth claims and status of various types of sentences, for example Isaac Levi's article 'Knowledge as True Belief.'[29] Then there are theological discussions that examine belief as an idea from the Christian religious perspective, for example John Habgood's *Varieties of Unbelief*.[30] These books presuppose that the reader holds the same belief system as the writer and takes it largely for granted that the existence of religious belief is a topic for serious discussion. There are also academic works, primarily in theology or philosophy which argue for the logic of religious belief, either as a sort of apologetic or as an historical tracing of a religion's belief system. An example of the former is Andrew Collier's *On Christian Belief: A Defence of a Cognitive Conception of Religious Belief in a Christian Context*. This book is really a discussion of faith, belief and knowledge and how they relate. In this Collier states that his aim is to show that religious belief is just as valid as any other belief and that such belief constitutes knowledge, and not just faith.[31]

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[29] In Levi's article knowledge is situated as something that can be reasoned with logic and formulas. In this manner he equates belief and knowledge: "X's state of full belief K is used to distinguish between serious possibilities (logical possibilities consistent with K) that are open to "real and living" doubts and serious impossibilities inconsistent with K whose falsehood is from the point of view of the inquirer absolutely certain. X fully believes that *h* if and only if the potential state of full belief is that *h* is a consequence of K." Isaac Levi, 'Knowledge as True Belief', *Belief Revision Meets Philosophy of Science: Logic, Epistemology, and the Unity of Science*, 21 (2011), 269-302 (p. 269).

[30] Habgood discusses the societal shift that has led to the contemporary unease with serious discussions of the practice of religion. He uses the examples of real people as much as possible to highlight the varieties of unbelief/belief. While he does reference theologians and philosophers, it is not an academic work: John Habgood, *Varieties of Unbelief* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

[31] "This is a book of philosophy, not of theology. I do not aim principally to defend the truth or rationality of any particular Christian belief. I aim to show that the sort of belief involved in Christianity is cognitive in nature, can be rational, and is made rational by things very like those which make other sorts of belief rational. It might be thought that for this reason the title 'on religious belief' would have been better. However, although some of my arguments could be used to defend the rationality of those other religions which claim to base themselves on God's self-revelation through scriptures – namely Judaism, Islam and the Bahai faith – there are so many arguments in the book that apply only to Christianity that it would be arrogant to claim to speak for religion in general. In defending the rationality of Christian belief, I am defending its claim to constitute knowledge. Since it has become almost a received opinion that Christian belief is 'faith' and that faith is not the same thing as knowledge, I want to get clear some points about the various meanings of words like 'faith', 'belief' and 'knowledge', and their mutual relations. I shall be

Collier's purpose seems to be to convince those who refuse to engage with religious belief as a serious subject.

The other areas of academic enquiry that deal with the rubric of belief are situated broadly in the social sciences that use ethnographic, cultural and ritual studies approaches. The following section investigates how different areas of academic research approach the concept of belief: epistemology, the sociology of knowledge, cultural theory, anthropology and ritual studies. In each area belief is associated with a variety of ideas and practices. This variety provides a rich resource of angles on what and how belief 'mean.' While my project seeks to explore what might be added to our understanding of belief by considering it in terms of performance. These other examples demonstrate how each field provides for its own disciplinary needs. Belief can be researched in many ways.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with "the study of knowledge and justified belief."[32] This approach links belief with knowledge and truth. The method of analysis is highly theoretical where ideas are examined as propositions in order to show whether knowledge is justifiable as belief dependent on whether or not it is true. The primary outcome of epistemology when working with belief is to equate belief to knowledge – although even this is not always the case. An example from Alvin I. Goldman shows the kind of logic employed in such arguments:

> What is knowledge? More specifically, what is propositional knowledge: what is it to know that something is the case? To know a proposition p is

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pointing out different uses of the words, but I shall also be stating how I use the words and why." Andrew Collier, *On Christian Belief: A Defence of a Cognitive Conception of Religious Belief in a Christian Context* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. iix.

[32] Matthias Steup, 'Epistemology', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010 Edition)*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/epistemology/> [accessed 9 May 2011].

> to know that it is true. But you cannot know that p is true unless it *is* true. So a necessary condition for knowledge is truth. Equally, you cannot know that p unless you are of the 'opinion' that p is true, unless you believe p. So belief, like truth, is necessary. But true belief is not sufficient for knowledge, at least not in the strict sense of 'know.' If it is just accidental that you are right about p, then you do not know that p, even if you are correct in believing it.[33]

Goldman explains the basic function that links belief to knowledge, but the nature of this definition of belief is quite broad, i.e. you have to be "of the opinion that p is true." And this is all based on the logic that you cannot know something is true unless it is true. For example:

> Suppose you wake up in a foul mood one morning and think to yourself, 'Today is going to be a miserable day'; and lo, a miserable day ensues. It does not follow that you *knew* in the morning that it was going to be a miserable day. It is just a fluke if such a feeling is right, and flukes are not sufficient for knowledge.[34]

This implies that belief is something that is only possible when the object of belief is provable. This is clearly different from belief as it is understood in relation to religious faith where to believe is to trust in that which cannot be proven.

The epistemological approach to belief discusses the content of a belief, references belief-types and analyses statements for truth claims and proofs. A result of this is that belief becomes a term that can be logically accounted for as one would account for concepts. David J. Chalmers equates concepts with beliefs explaining them both as mental entities:

> I take concepts to be mental entities on a par with beliefs: they are constituents of beliefs (and other propositional attitudes) in a manner loosely analogous to the way in which words are constituents of sentences. Like beliefs, concepts are tokens rather than types in the first instance. But they also fall under types, some of which I explore in what follows. In such cases it is natural to use singular expressions such as 'the concept' for a concept-type, just as one sometimes uses expressions such as 'the belief' for a belief-type, or 'the word' for a word-type. I will use

[33] Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 42.
[34] Goldman, p. 42.

italics for concepts and beliefs throughout.[35]

This approach to the discussion of belief is clearly focused on that which can be logically argued and proved and not directed to looking for patterns of behaviour and practices.

**Sociology of Knowledge**

The sociology of knowledge belongs to the field of sociology but is not a subset of the field. It can be better understood as a "tradition of inquiry" that has looked above all to address two key ideas: that "knowledge is socially determined" and that "knowledge constitutes a social order."[36] E Doyle McCarthy summarizes the history of the sociology of knowledge in *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge*. At a high level the interests of sociology are similar to those necessary to the analysis of performance practices, as McCarthy puts it - "Knowledge and experience are coterminous—they arise and develop simultaneously in human acts."[37]

Throughout the book the concept of belief is mentioned and most often in relation to power. The logic behind this link is ideology – beliefs are linked with ideologies and these are in turn seen as integral to how social groups function and maintain or gain power.[38] Not only interested in the ideas behind behaviour, sociology examines materiality as well. Even in relation to materiality, it is

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[35] David J. Chalmers, 'The Content and Epistemology of Phenomenal Belief', in *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Q. Smith and A. Jokic (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 220-272 (p. 223, footnote 2).

[36] E. Doyle McCarthy, *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 12. "Its ideas address the broadest sociological questions about the extent and limits of social and group influences in people's lives and the social and cultural foundations of cognition and perception" (p. 11).

[37] McCarthy, p. 4.

[38] "These descriptions bring us to another special mark of ideologies: ideologies belong to the category of beliefs. But they are not just any kind of belief; they are contentious beliefs that become fully articulated and asserted in situations involving conflicts and interests, struggles over right and power. In other words, ideas and beliefs in themselves are not ideological, but they can become so in practices of particular kinds" (McCarthy, p. 32).

ideology which is emphasized, as this example that includes ideas from political and critical theory demonstrates:

> The meaning of ideas and belief systems, the Marxist theory claimed, could be read from the material domain. "Ideology" involved both the separation and opposition of ideas and reality, the "real foundation" out of which ideas grew. "Ideology" also furthered cultural ideas set in motion by industrial capitalism—what Ricoeur has called "a kind of realism of life," which we identify with this epoch, one where materiality is thought to precede ideas.[39]

That which is experienced by each person in daily interactions with materials is a key part of formation ideas and beliefs. There are implications for theories of embodied experience if, as Ricoeur thought, "materiality precedes ideas." This puts more emphasis on the performative and the interactions that are enabled though action.

Another way to understand how the sociology of knowledge engages the concept of belief is through an example based on Althusser's work on the functioning of ideologies. Here identity is identified as a product of knowledge, beliefs and thought: "For what I know and believe and think are not merely knowledges or beliefs or thoughts; they are what I know and what I believe and what I think. They inscribe themselves in what I do, who I am—my identity."[40] This explanation is still rather vague and McCarthy then describes in detail the kinds of logics that enable elements of practice to be situated clearly in relation to other aspects of the overall pattern. She uses "Althusser's more general descriptive examples" in the following passage:

> If a person believes in God, she goes to church or to temple or to the local assembly. She prays and meets with others who are of her faith. She speaks to her children about God and goodness and faith. There are duties that she knows to be right. These are inscribed in what she does (and doesn't do) when her parents or children get sick, and in what she does for her husband. These actions are given meaning, such as in a community or

[39] McCarthy, p. 40.
[40] McCarthy, p. 44.

> in an assembly of prayer, in marriage and friendships, and in the feelings that she is allowed to express (or not to express). Her actions are also given meaning in the speeches of churchmen and politicians she listens to about family values and motherhood, in what she is told by those authorities from whom she seeks advice. Then there are the familial, social, and religious rituals attendant upon these actions, providing the occasions where even her bodily gestures express authority in one instance, dependency in another. Then there are the forms and degrees of sentiment attached to these attitudes and ideas. In each of these ways a person's ideas are her actions and sentiments and gestures. Her ideas exist in actions; her actions are inserted into practices; practices are governed by the rituals she chooses to undergo.[41]

As is clear from her application, beliefs are directly tied to ideologies which in turn are linked with material and mental practices. These are then seen as part of larger social structures including the political dimension of life. All of these combine into an approach which is quite applicable to the kind of work done by some parts of performance studies. This is a productive way to look at the overall pattern of human behaviours, and it is comprehensive. It would complement research done in performance studies if the goal was to analyse performance as part of a totality of social behaviour, with an emphasis on ideology and the political.

**Cultural Theory**

Many disciplines claim cultural theory, which is a necessarily interdisciplinary area of research. The field of sociology uses it in a way congruent to my approach to the integration of theory. A primary aspect of all fields that use cultural theory is the use of theories themselves – from Marx, to Foucault, Stuart Hall to Pierre Bourdieu – the theories come from critical theory, philosophy and sociology. Sociology's use of theory demonstrates a sustained interest in the application of theories to the practical applications of the field. Case studies and practical

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[41] McCarthy, p. 44.

examples are balanced with theoretical concepts. In the book *Cultural Theory: Classical and Contemporary Positions* the essays on applied theory tackle a wide range of topics, for example, feminist epistemology and participatory action paired with a reconsideration of the Frankfurt School and phenomenology. This is typical of the work of contemporary cultural theory.

An example of work by Ann Brooks on the Chinese diaspora and 'politics of veiling' in Islamic groups combines examples from case studies with theories on feminism, subjectivity and identity.[42] As Tim Edwards explains, when faced with research that demands wide ranging engagements with culture, Brooks comes to the conclusion that in order to address such broad topics interdisciplinarity is the best method to employ:

> Through a wide-ranging discussion, often placing a heavy emphasis upon questions of feminist praxis, she concludes that neither the traditions of sociology nor cultural studies alone are wide enough to incorporate the complexities of contemporary culture. Implicit within this…is an engagement with interdisciplinarity or, more basically, an argument for what one might call subject hybrids combining and drawing on an array of disciplinary backgrounds.[43]

Brooks explains that in her research multiple fields are brought to bear. This is necessary and relevant because the use of multiple fields is reflective of the contemporary reality of the social world:

> The interdisciplinary matrix of cultural studies including feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, critical ethnography, film, literature and cultural politics have been shown to produce a dynamic interplay of epistemological and representational discourses more reflective of the transnationalization of genders, classes, ethnicities, and publics which frame the contemporary social world.[44]

I echo her assertion that this approach yields more comprehensive results when

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[42] Ann Brooks, 'Reconceptualizing Representation and Identity: Issues of transculturalism and transnationalism in the intersection of feminism and cultural sociology', in *Cultural Theory: Classical and Contemporary Positions*, ed. by Tim Edwards (London: Sage, 2007), pp. 183-209.
[43] Tim Edwards, ed. 'Introduction', *Cultural Theory: Classical and Contemporary Positions* (London: Sage, 2007), pp. 1-4 (p. 4).
[44] Brooks, p. 206.

the subject of the research is an aspect of the contemporary social world. Bringing together multiple approaches is multifaceted and subtler than discipline-bound analyses. While not overtly a cultural theory approach to performance, my work is still consonant with the aims and practices of this area of research.

**Anthropology and Ritual Studies**

Two more fields closely related to sociology and cultural theory are anthropology and ritual studies. Both deal directly with belief as it impacts the rituals and actions of the people who are researched. However, belief is often treated as a given in the work. Traditional approaches to anthropological research have led to belief being taken for granted in a specific manner. A cursory glance at the field reveals a pattern of analysis focused on the understanding that "ritual is symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behavior of life."[45] Talal Asad positions the development of this understanding as historical in his book *Genealogies of Religion*. With reference to major figures in the field, such as Clifford Geertz, Asad rehearses standard explanations of ritual and religion, e.g. Geertz's definition of religion as a "system of symbols."[46] In this formulation rituals are symbols that communicate what Geertz calls the "general order." To use an example, an interpretation of participation in the Eucharist would be to see it as an expression of belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God. The Eucharistic ritual can be seen as symbolic activity that also references a deeper belief; the ritual is

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[45] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (London: Johns Hopkins, 1993), p. 55.

[46] "A *religion*, he proposes, is "(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." (Geertz [90] in Asad 30) This is referenced later in Chapter 4 where Wouter J. Hanegraaff reformulates it in the section on the New Age.

an "outward sign" of an "inward meaning."[47] Ethnographers and scholars of religion thus try to communicate the beliefs that the rituals are meant to express. As most of the rituals examined since the advent of anthropology have come from outside of the Western paradigm one of the key tasks that the anthropologist fulfills is, as Asad clarifies, to frame the actions as symbolic before they become "candidates for interpretation."[48] Rituals are constantly undergoing translation, but these translations are always with the anthropologist's culture in mind, because it is there that the work will be read. The 'text' that is read is a compilation of the signs that have been deciphered to 'reveal' the presumed inner meaning of the ritual.

Asad goes on to explain why he is not satisfied with this theory of ritual. He presents a different framework through which to read ritual activity that takes him from medieval Christian practices through various definitions throughout the centuries. He emphasizes instead, that to theorize ritual as symbolic activity expressive of an inner state limits understandings of how religion and ritual function.

A primary text for Asad's argument is the 1973 essay "Techniques of the Body" by sociologist Marcel Mauss. Mauss' approach to human behaviour talks of learned capabilities instead of habits or customs. Employing the Latin word *habitus*, Mauss developed a framework that linked repeated actions not just to individual idiosyncracies but social context: "we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual *practical reason* rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties."[49] "Practical reason," in this sense is the 'learned capacities'. He does not want the body understood as one

[47] Asad, p. 59.
[48] Asad, p. 61.
[49] Mauss in Asad, p. 75. [My emphasis.]

half of a binary set with the soul/mind on the other side. This would cast it as a "passive recipient of 'cultural imprints.'"[50] This is particularly problematic if the body can be conceptualised as "readable sign," of an "inner character," as if a person can be read by observing the body.[51] The entire person should, instead, be seen to be a "developable means for achieving a range of human objectives" (physical, emotional, and spiritual objectives).[52] An example of an "embodied aptitude" is a ballet dancer. The body "knows" the steps to Swann Lake differently than the mind knows it.[53] The body as a term is not equal to the task at hand. The entire person performs embodied practices which are not necessarily based on logical thought processes.

Asad uses the theory of *habitus* because he finds it particularly compelling in relation to ritual: "[it] invites us to analyze the body as an assemblage of embodied aptitudes, not as a medium of symbolic meanings."[54] I raise Asad's work because it complements the approach I am taking in relation to putting emphasis on the embodied practices in ritual.[55]

Many discussions of belief only mention the word tangentially. In fact, this is a wide-ranging problem for anyone in any field who wants to look in depth at belief because most academic engagements talk around belief itself. This happens because belief is difficult to articulate, because all people use examples and metaphor to explain the relationship belief has to daily life, and because it is often through ritual and action that belief has been explained. This is partly due to

[50] Mauss in Asad, p. 76.
[51] Mauss in Asad, p. 76.
[52] Asad, p. 76.
[53] Asad, p. 76.
[54] Asad, p. 75.
[55] This discussion of Asad's work is indebted to conversations with, and an unpublished article by, Jerilyn Sambrooke, "Meaningless Rituals: Embodied Practice and Freedom in *Purple Hibiscus*", (2011).

the prevalence of the idea that outward signs could prove belief. The variety of ways that belief has been defined has led more to confusion than to clarity, as Catherine Bell explains:

> When defined in terms of the mental states of individuals, belief has been deemed beyond the reach of social analysis. Yet belief has also been described as irreducibly social in nature, a matter of collectively significant activities rather than personally held concepts or attitudes. More frequently, belief systems are understood to be a matter of cultural worldviews or communally constructed ideological systems, quite beyond what a particular person may or may not hold to be true.[56]

This multivalent view of how belief has been defined points to the problems of both defining the term too closely and too loosely.

Many studies into what people believe have shown that belief does not work by producing the same ideas and concepts in all the practitioners. In fact, more and more it has been shown that the practice of communal rituals, including prayer, work because they allow for multiplicity of vision, understanding and practice. As Bell writes: "Hinduism for Hindus is not a coherent belief system, but, first and foremost, a collection of practices."[57] Yet, after a few hundred years of anthropological study the same topics are still being investigated. Perhaps the questions themselves differ slightly, but it could also be that it is the answers themselves that are changing as contemporary research continues to see a need to interrogate ritual action. Bell succinctly summarizes what it is about ritual that remains ephemeral:

> [H]ow does ritual do what we keep saying it does: How does it actually inculcate cultural or political values, converting beliefs about another world into facts about this one and vice versa, and "inventing" traditions even as it purports to be transmitting them? These questions reflect a concern to analyze symbols and rites as real, effective, and powerful, not as simply secondary and expressive or as mere ideological tools that

[56] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 182-3.
[57] Bell, p. 185.

brainwash by dint of redundant assertions and group enthusiasm.[58]

A completely different approach to the answer of 'how does ritual do what we say it does' comes from those who write about their lived experiences as members of religious groups. Lauren F. Winner is a professor of Christian Spirituality, but has also written extensively about her life as an Orthodox Jew and her conversion to Christianity. In *Mudhouse Sabbath* she shares her meditations on various shared practices between Judaism and Christianity. Winner comments on the practices associated with the Sabbath, food, mourning, hospitality, prayer, the body, fasting, ageing, candle-lighting, weddings, and doorposts. In each case she looks at the historical and scriptural reasons that Judaism engages with the practices. Overarchingly she makes the case that, "for Jews, the essence of the thing is a doing, an action. Your faith might come and go, but your practice ought not waiver. (Indeed Judaism suggests that the repeating of the practice is the best way to ensure that a doubter's faith will return.)"[59] This focus on action is drawn out through each chapter and the context is given for each practice in Christianity. Her point is that practices are what form people at a foundational level. One example in particular is about prayer, specifically liturgical prayer:

> Judaism is not the only religion to pray liturgically. *Salah*, the five-times-a-day Muslim prayer, is also liturgical. The American Buddhist Congress is developing a Buddhist liturgy, urging a "flexible standardization of the liturgy so that anyone attending [a] service anywhere in the country could feel at home, understand, and join in." And many Christians—in particular Anglicans, Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox—rely on prayer books, reciting set prayers at set hours of each day.[60]

The daily rhythms of life are directly linked to the beliefs people hold and how these are integrated into the overall pattern of life. Indeed, as the dissertation will

[58] Bell, p. 194.
[59] Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2003), p. ix.
[60] Winner, p. 56.

show, beliefs are at the foundation of more than just cultural ritual. They inform every aspect of how we act and interact with the world around us.

To question what is meant by belief is clearly to enter into a large and wide ranging discussion. In this dissertation I start with metaphysics and the foundations of Western thought. Greek philosophy and Christian theology together form the basis for conceptions of salvation, the metaphysical and the body in Western culture. Despite their inherent contradictions, which I explain in detail later, they have and continue to affect all understandings of the entire person in relation to belief. It is Derrida who shows most clearly that these structures cannot go away, that every thought and piece of writing is already caught even where it seeks to escape. Derrida reads Plato, Nietzsche and Artaud through this idea – that the processes of metaphysics make it impossible to formulate anything from outside of the system. Derrida's essay, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' on Artaud's most famous text, *The Theatre and its Double*, brings together all the strands I have talked about thus far. Here Derrida places Nietzsche next to Plato, next to theology, next to theatre and shows the circularity of metaphysics, and the process of representation.

## THE CLOSURE OF REPRESENTATION

Artaud's theories provide the basis for Derrida to discuss the full scope of the influence of metaphysics in relation to theatrical practices. Artaud discusses theatre, not performance, and I do not use him again in the dissertation. This short example of how Derrida treats Artaud's work acts as a primer for the extensive discussion of metaphysics and representation that happens throughout the thesis. In *The Theatre and its Double* Artaud takes to task the theatre itself, critics,

philosophers, theorists and all those involved in producing and directing Western theatre.[61] He vehemently disagrees with theatre as simple entertainment and make believe, and advocates for a theatre like that of the Balinese that "does away with entertainment, that aspect of useless artificiality, an evening's amusement so typical of our own theatre."[62] Artaud does not want the audience to have to 'disbelieve' what they are watching and experiencing, yet the kind of belief he is looking for is not simply a reversal of that which currently exists. Part of what he wants to change is the style of presentation itself in order to 'fix' the problem of representation, or as he calls it here, lies and illusion:

> [I]f we have all finally come to regard theatre as an inferior art, a means of coarse distraction, using it as an outlet for our worst instincts, this is because we have for too long been told theatre is all lies and illusion. Because for four hundred years, that is since the Renaissance, we have become accustomed to purely descriptive, narrative theatre, narrating psychology.[63]

Artaud's call for change in theatre is not just an irate rant, he has suggestions for the direction Western theatre can look for inspiration. In particular he is interested in the forms of expression he saw in a piece of Balinese theatre (shown at an exposition in Paris), as his comments about the show demonstrate: "There is something of a religious ritual ceremony about them, in the sense that they eradicate any idea of pretence, a ridiculous imitation of real life, from the spectator's mind."[64] The form and structure of religious ritual allowed, or so argues Artaud, for the performers to be themselves, to put aside representation and engage with objects and action that accomplished something tangible, e.g. eating, singing, touching a sacred object, etc. It is this engagement with the physical and material that Artaud is specifically interested in activating: "Theatre

[61] Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, trans. by Victor Corti (London: John Calder, 1981 [1970]).
[62] Artaud, 'On the Balinese Theatre', in The Theatre and Its Double, pp. 36-49 (p. 42).
[63] Artaud, 'No More Masterpieces' in The Theatre and Its Double, pp. 55-63 (p. 57).
[64] Artaud, 'On the Balinese Theatre', p. 42.

is the only place in the world, the last group means we still possess of directly affecting the anatomy."[65]

In order to really affect people it was necessary to make them feel and experience theatre through the physical and material. To do this Artaud developed his own theory of theatre and called it the Theatre of Cruelty. By cruelty, Artaud does not refer to acts of physical violence, but rather to the task of building an awareness of the human position in the world:

> [A] "theatre of cruelty" means theatre that is difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on a performing level, it has nothing to do with the cruelty we practice on one another, hacking at each other's bodies….but the far more terrible, essential cruelty objects can practice on us. We are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads. And above all else theatre is made to teach us this.[66]

In order to succeed in affecting people at a deep emotional level Artaud called for drastic changes in how theatre makers thought of every aspect of theatre, from dialogue, to objects themselves:

> Yet to change the purpose of theatre dialogue is to use it in an actual spatial sense, uniting it with everything in theatre that is spatial and significant in the tangible field. This means handling it as something concrete, disturbing things, first spatially, then in an infinitely more secret and mysterious field permitting more scope.[67]

He demands that theatre be thought of firstly in relation to its physical and material aspects, which lead to discussions of the intangible and mysterious, or in other words, the spiritual. It is the physicality and materiality of theatre that Artaud foregrounds. He wants theatre to affect the entire person because he understands spiritual experiences to be linked to that which is experienced by the whole being. What he does not want is for the theatrical experience to be limited to intellectual ruminations which do not lead anywhere.

In 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' Jacques

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[65] Artaud, 'No More Masterpieces', p. 61.
[66] Artaud, 'No More Masterpieces', p. 60.
[67] Artaud, 'Oriental and Western Theatre', in The Theatre and Its Double, pp. 50-54 (p. 53).

Derrida expands on Artaud's theories, applying them to a wider discussion of the affects of metaphysics on Western artistic practices. Derrida agrees that the binary of real and representation is at the heart of the problem with Western theatre: "The menace of repetition is nowhere else as well organized as in theatre. Nowhere else is one so close to the stage as the origin of repetition."[68] His criticism is not, however, just with theatre but with all of Western culture: "This representation whose structure is imprinted not only on the art, but on the entire culture of the West (its religions, philosophies, politics), therefore designates more than just a particular type of theatrical construction."[69] The impact of metaphysics and representation is insidious, and the theatre has been subject to these processes perhaps more than other art forms.

In his reading of Artaud, Derrida continually references other writers whose work impacts the vision of theatre that Artaud promoted. Derrida comments on theatre directly as the art form which might best destroy imitation and mimesis, which both Nietzsche and Artaud worked towards in their writing.[70] Derrida links Nietzsche to Artaud repeatedly in relation to the role of the audience, the weakness of imitation compared to reality, and the nature of being. Making these connections is crucial because Derrida shows a genealogy of thought that stems from Plato. He uses the concept of being to make these connections and he defines 'being' thus: "Being is the form in which the infinite diversity of the forms and forces of life and death can indefinitely merge and be repeated in the word. For there is no word, nor in general a sign, which is not

[68] Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', in Writing and Difference, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001 [1978]), pp. 232-250 (p. 247).
[69] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 234.
[70] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 234.

constituted by the possibility of repeating itself."[71] The definition of being is at the heart of this argument about representation, and Derrida makes explicit the commonalities between his own writings and those of Artaud, Nietzsche, and Plato: "Like Nietzsche…Artaud refuses to subsume Life to Being." Derrida identifies Artaud's thinking as part of the tradition of critiquing metaphysics; Artaud uses the phrase "the beyond of being" which Derrida calls a "[manipulation of] this expression of Plato's…in a Nietzschean style."[72] It is through this discussion of being that Derrida builds links to the idea of theatre and nonrepresentation. The only way to think of theatre which allows for any part of it to not be representative is to call on its performative qualities, i.e. how it exists in the moment of its performance and how that existence cannot be captured. Derrida puts it this way: theatre "is neither a book nor a work, but an energy, and in this sense it is the only art of life."[73]

Yet, Derrida does not produce a manifesto endorsing the Theatre of Cruelty as the saving force against metaphysics; "Artaud knew that the theatre of cruelty neither begins nor is completed within the purity of simple presence, but rather is already within representation."[74] Derrida brings his essay to a close by systematically enumerating all the reasons why the theatre Artaud aspired to remains impossible. One key reason was Western theatre's dependence on words. Artaud and Derrida agree that Western society focuses on language as the locus of information and power. When theatre is dominated by language and metaphysics Derrida refers to it as theological:

> The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the

[71] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 246.
[72] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 246.
[73] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 247.
[74] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 248.

> theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas.[75]

In other words, theatre currently looks outwards to texts which dictate what happens on stage, as well as to the author who is understood as the expert on the text. The stage is a space used to represent all that the author, through the text, deems important. Derrida sees this arrangement as one of the main limits to the potential of the stage, and lists what theatre would have to avoid in order to be freed from representation:

> The stage, certainly, *will no longer represent*, since it will not operate as an addition, as the sensory illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage, which the stage would then only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute. The stage will no longer operate as the representation of a *present*, will no longer *re*-present a present that would exist elsewhere and prior to it, a present whose plenitude would be older than it, absent from it and rightfully capable of doing without it: the being-present-to-itself of the absolute Logos, the living present of God. Nor will the stage be a *representation*, if representation means the surface of a spectacle displayed for spectators. It will not even offer the presentation of a present, if present signifies that which is maintained *in front* of me. Cruel representation must permeate me. And nonrepresentation is, thus, original representation, if representation signifies, also, the unfolding of a volume, a multidimensional milieu, an experience which produces its own space.[76]

Theatre cannot but be circumscribed by the structures of representation: there is no way to step outside of the logics of representation as it is always already present. In which case, what is Derrida's reason for starting the discussion in the first place? Typically, Derrida uses the problems he lists in the article as an opportunity for a discussion which ultimately is not about theatre so much as it is about representation. It is at the end of the article that Derrida adds another

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[75] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 235.
[76] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 237.

perspective on representation that complicates the notion of repetition ending or beginning:

> Because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself. That is to say, closure is its *playing* space. This movement is the movement of the world as play.[77]

It is the way that theatre fits into the problem of repetition itself that is of interest to Derrida. As he explains, "[Artaud] cannot resign himself to theatre as repetition, and cannot renounce theatre as nonrepetition."[78] The theatre of cruelty is interesting because it allows for a discussion of this playing space, of the movements at the closure of representation.

It is not productive to argue a way out of representation because there is no escape, yet there must be ways to put representation to the side in order to look at what happens within the cycle of representation. If one of the greatest problems with representation is the idea of imitation, mimesis, or the repetition of that which has already been signified, then what is needed is a way to conceive of action as nonrepresentative, if only for a moment. Even Derrida, as previously mentioned (theatre "is neither a book nor a work"), recognizes that theatre or in my examples – performance – does have an aspect to it which seems to be about the present moment and nothing else: "theatrical representation is finite, and leaves behind it, behind its actual presence, no trace, no object to carry off."[79] My proposition is to focus on this moment of presence, the moment of action, not to negate the text or texts from which a piece of theatre or performance may originate, nor to ignore the representation(s) which must take place in order for theatre to happen. The closure of representation will happen, indeed the closure

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[77] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 250.
[78] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', p. 249.
[79] Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty,' p. 247.

that Derrida explains may be helpful as it is bound up with movement and play, and with actions. It is to action and the analysis of action that I turn to propose a method of analysis that is precisely suited to this task: the performative.

Performative action is a never ending process of human action (verbal and spoken) that is based in repetition, but this repetition produces something new that evolves with each repetition. In other words, as representation cycles back, or closes in on itself, to start a new repetition there is the potential for developments, shifts, new meanings, to emerge. This is discussed at length in Chapter 1 and so I will not rehearse the entirety of the theory of performativity here. What is important about the approach I am using is its applicability and usefulness in relation to performance practices, especially ones which are religious/spiritual in nature. As already mentioned in the descriptions of the chapters, my two case studies are on Roman Catholic liturgy and the performance art of Marina Abramović.

The Roman Catholic liturgy is an example of a performance form which developed in the West and has been the main influence on spiritual practices for close to 2,000 years. Its rhythms and structures permeate Western literature but its relevance to contemporary performance theory and practices is under-developed. It might seem strange to use a form which exists not only as a text, but as one of the most highly controlled and contextualised texts. The Roman Catholic Church oversees the administration of the liturgy to the smallest detail and revisions to the text are only allowed after long and serious debate. Liturgy cannot escape from its textual roots but I argue that any performance of the liturgy must also be seen as an enactment of liturgical action and not just the enactment of text. I do not argue for a Christian reading of performance, nor for

liturgy that is a perfect representation of worship. This is not a theological reading but one focused on performative action.

Throughout its history Christian understandings of the metaphysical have predominated over physical and material aspects of being. I introduce the performative nature of belief to the discussion of what has typically been metaphysical to bring out precisely that which Artaud and Nietzsche found lacking both in metaphysics and in Christianity. In the process, I show how liturgy is not about spectators who passively receive, but participants who act and create the liturgy through their bodies and their interaction with objects. This is an analysis that examines how the materials of the liturgy are part of the instantiation and manifestation of belief. Instead of insisting that Western religious practice is reliant on thinking and reason, representation and metaphysics, this dissertation identifies how belief in the West is about the bodies of those present and what happens to those bodies. This also avoids the problem of comparing the liturgy to another practice or using drama or theatre as a metaphor for the way in which liturgy functions. The analysis focuses on the practices themselves in order to understand the performative function of the form. The liturgy is ideal as a performance form because even as it exists as a text, it is only through its enactment by the body of believers that it, the liturgy, comes into being. It confuses the clear lines of argumentation about the theatre as presented by Derrida and demonstrates that the Christian performance form is not just about the metaphysical.

The two case studies are ultimately focused on four main points.

1) The analysis of the liturgy shows that a performative approach is necessary and productive to the study of the liturgy the field of theology;
2) An argument is also made for the relevance of the liturgy to the

study of rituals from within the field of performance studies;

3) The case study on performance art highlights that the religious/spiritual themes and images are rarely critiqued or understood as belonging to Western tradition; and
4) That performance studies is as deeply embedded in Western discourse as any other field, yet has little to no awareness, or ability to identify, discuss or treat Christian symbols or themes.

These points build one upon the other throughout the dissertation. They are not meant to be comparative, instead they show different problems from different fields. These ultimately overlap in terms of relevance to the overall study of belief in religious/spiritual performance.

When Western artists and academics are confronted with a performance that either the artist or the spectators/participants frame as religious/spiritual, the critic immediately reaches for Eastern spiritual practices as the basis of comparison. Yet, as my research shows, when these practices are put next to Christian ones it becomes obvious that Christian practices are also grounded in bodily and material practices. Both rely on stimulating the senses through the use of objects, and both Eastern and Western traditions, in all their variations, have a full range of practices from the ascetic to the communal. Western religious practices need to be understood as relevant, in the same way that the Eastern currently are, to contemporary Western performance practices. The case study on performance art is used to make this argument and to highlight how the structure of Western belief is also at play in performance art. It is these links between belief and the entire person, between belief and tangible physical demands and experiences that is missing. Simply making the case for analyses of performance art in order to compare it to liturgy is not the answer. This would just produce comparisons which were based on representation and would thus fall into the same kinds of logics which Derrida, Nietzsche and Artaud argue against. As with

the liturgy, an analysis that highlights the performative action in performance art allows belief itself to be conceptualised in a more complex way. The result of which is a broader understanding of how performance, spirituality and belief are interconnected in Western practice.

Placing the contemporary performance art of Marina Abramović next to Christian liturgy might have seemed like an idiosyncratic choice, but recent publications point to other connections being made between the fields that treat Christian practice and performance studies. *Performance Research*'s issue *On Congregation* (2008), is an example of this interest. Of the seventeen articles in the issue, twelve make reference at least once to the word 'Christian.' A third discuss some aspect of liturgy, and all are invested in bringing together theoretical concerns with their accounts of embodied practices. This is all positive in terms of the field being open to the idea of studying the Christian tradition that has been so long neglected. However, the approaches of these articles are very different to my own. All are interested in the representational and historical whether through an examination of preaching, dance, the drama of the liturgy or church led theatrical events in the Netherlands in the mid twentieth century.

I want to highlight two articles from the issue whose approach comes closest to what I advocate. Addressing the concept of the post-Christian narrative, Rina Arya examines two performance artists, Herman Nitzsch and Marina Abramović, but she chooses to work with performance from the 1960s and 1970s (the one exception is a mention of Abramović's 1997 *Spirit House*). Arya is interested in what can be discussed when theology and performance studies are brought together around ideas of "the sacred and the profane, the relationship between wounding and healing, and finally the establishment of the communal or

the congregational."[80] She is interested in the role of the body, and in her assessment what performance studies offers is a way to relook at established practices, and see their importance as material practices. How she does this is not innovative, but her comment on where Christian practice should fit is apt:

> Christianity is often kept out of the performance arena, but in this meeting of theology and performance practice we experience a synergy, which rehabilitates both practices. Theological thinking is revised, updated and moved from its doctrinal and institutionalized focus to a post-Christian understanding of the significance of its rituals and practices.[81]

It is on this point – that performance theory enables a revision of theological understandings and leads to broader understandings of the rituals and practices – that Arya's work is in line with my argument.

Another article in the same journal also examines liturgy as ritual however, not as performative. Claire Maria Chambers Blackstock's argument brings to mind my use of performativity, but she does not use the term in her work:

> In the same way that rhetoric in language is the effective and persuasive use of words, the rhetoric of ritual effectively and persuasively uses rhetorical elements such as dance, gesture, word, visual art, music, food and incense to demonstrate liturgy as a communal practice that moves beyond the repetition of a creed to an argument for a radical reality. To be fully present in the liturgy is to be fully present to the entirety of life, inside and outside the church building.[82]

Comparing the effects of language with those of ritual action she argues that it is through embodied repetition that the beliefs (as expressed through the liturgy) are made reality for the participants. Her article focuses on "the dancing congregation at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, California" and positions "liturgical congregational dance as theory-making practice danced out

[80] Arya, p. 31.
[81] Rina Arya, 'Ecstasy and Pain: The Ritualistic Dimensions of Performance Practice', *Performance Research*, 13.3 (2008), 31-40 (p. 39).
[82] Claire Maria Chambers Blackstock, 'The Rhetoric of Ritual: Transformation as Revelation and Congregational Liturgical Dance as Performance Theory', *Performance Research*, 13.3 (2008), 100-108 (p. 100).

in theory-making space."[83] Blackstock engages more directly with the subjects of her case study and interviews them about their experiences with this form of liturgy. She also uses liturgy as a metaphor for the spiritual relationships that exist between the participants and each other, and the participants and God. Her approach emphasises the material nature of Christian ritual and its effect on the people who perform. None of the other articles in the journal attempt what this dissertation argues, neither in scope nor in approach. The two articles from *Performance Research* are examples of work that engages both sides of my own interests, and demonstrate that the study of Christian ritual is relevant to contemporary research.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the dissertation I use examples and other fields to argue for the importance of performative action in all its forms; in meaning-making, in relation to agency and for affecting and effecting belief. Through this research belief is seen as an embodied practice, encompassing the entire person. The performances associated with belief are shown to require more from participants than mental acceptance with no physical aspect, or physical participation with no mental engagement. The whole person is implicated in the instantiation and manifestation of the performance of belief.

[83] Blackstock, p. 100.

## CHAPTER 1
## BEYOND THE METAPHYSICS OF BELIEF

Belief is instantiated and manifested through embodied practices that engage the entire person. To substantiate this claim from the introduction I turn first to philosophy, which in the Western tradition began with the Greeks. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century a discussion of metaphysics, philosophy and belief can happen through many philosophical routes. I have chosen to take my lead from perhaps the best known critic of metaphysical structures of recent times, Jacques Derrida. Derrida asks provocative, difficult questions which often lead to a surprising range of answers. The question below is no different; it seems to be about religious discourse however Derrida implicitly references the history of Western thought, as well as how languages communicate salvation:

> *Pretext for a first question: can a discourse on religion be dissociated from a discourse of salvation: which is to say, on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed, the immune (*sacer, sanctus, heilig*, holy, and their alleged equivalents in so many languages)?*[1]

Within Derrida's question is the assumption that religion leads to salvation, and that salvation is metaphysical. Derrida also situates his question squarely within a Western paradigm by listing the word 'holy' in a few Western European languages. Western cultural understandings of religion presuppose that these topics are related and need to be examined together, but as with all of Derrida's questions, there are many possible answers. He asks whether a discussion of religion needs to be framed by salvation and metaphysics, and regardless of the answer an idea that follows from the first question is – what would the

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[1] Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Source of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone,' in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 41-101, (p. 42). [Original emphasis.] Derrida goes on in the essay to continually question the notion of belief in relation to religion and language: "*We believe we can pretend to believe—fiduciary act—that we share in some pre-understanding. We act as though we had some common sense of what "religion" means through the languages that we believe (how much belief already, to this moment, to this very day!) we know how to speak*" (p. 44). [Original emphasis.]

conversation look like without salvation and metaphysics? The question opens up the possibility of thinking about religion in physical and material ways which in turn might allow for other understandings of religious practice.

Religion is, of course, concerned with that which cannot be physically apprehended, but the rituals which adherents of a religion use are by their nature embodied practices. The engagement with material things and places is a dynamic and important part of the lived experience of the spiritual. Christianity, for all of the emphasis put on how dependent it is on its metaphysical heritage, has developed performative rituals which rely on the physical and material aspects of spiritual experience, e.g. the Roman Catholic liturgy. The ways in which this inheritance continues to influence us in the West are complex. I seek to interrogate contemporary and historical understandings of belief and propose that the Christian foundations of Western culture provide embodied forms and structures integral to the practice of belief itself. This chapter is theoretical and it sets up the analyses of performance in the case studies of Chapters 3 and 4; however, it also stands on its own as an independent contribution to the concept of the performance of belief.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I start by taking up Derrida's question in specific relation to belief. I begin with Plato and rehearse his concept of metaphysics with emphasis on the binary structure of body/soul. I then move to the advent of Christianity and the role of belief within this tradition. The very different conceptions of the body/soul are discussed at length. This leads to Friedrich Nietzsche and his writings that sought to undermine truth claims whether from Christianity or from philosophy. This thread is then taken up by Jacques Derrida who takes a different approach to dissecting the metaphysical

structures inherited from Plato. This first section finishes with a short introduction to Nancey Murphy's contemporary work in theology arguing for a revisiting of the Hebrew concepts of the 'God breathed body.'

The second section shifts disciplines to anthropology and religious studies. The focus is on scholars who address the use of language and its effects on the people they study. A particularly enlightening study was done by Jean Pouillon who compares the use of 'belief' and 'to believe' in Christian cultures to an African language used by members of a syncretic religion. Together these examples make the case for the specificity of Western belief and the role that language plays in expressing and explaining belief; language and belief evolve together in continuous interaction.

The third section introduces yet another area of study, speech act theory. This theory originates in linguistics, but has been adopted and developed by theorists from many fields. I rehearse the basic workings of the linguistic theory as articulated by J.L. Austin and John R. Searle and then move to Judith Butler who has done significant work on the performative nature of human behaviours. While it is her theories on gender and the capacity of speech to injure that have been most influential in performance studies, another theorist, Saba Mahmood is introduced for her use of the performative in research with religious groups. To return to Derrida: What does a discourse on religion look like without a focus on salvation?

## REREADING METAPHYSICS

### Plato

Plato did not call his ideas a 'salvation theory,' but they have contributed directly to Western notions of salvation. Plato discussed the transcendental, celestial,

other-worldly, divine, spiritual and religious, alongside his thoughts on the city state, the arts, philosophy, and of course the theory of Forms (or Ideas). In an examination of a section of *The Republic*, Gregory Vlastos comments on how integrated the spiritual is within the writing: "Plato passes here within a single sentence and without any transitional marker from the moral to the religious dimension. And this he does time and time again."[2] The texts in *The Republic* are full of Plato's spiritual ideas and these are not separated structurally or grammatically from the rest. For Plato a discussion of the unseen and unknown was necessary, so necessary that the eternal life of the soul depended on a person striving for the 'intelligible place.'[3] Salvation was only possible when the soul sought out higher planes of existence. With this in mind I rehearse some of the most well known passages about the Forms to highlight the way in which salvation is implicit in Plato's metaphysics.[4] This section sets the ground work for how salvation became a structural principle in Western philosophical discourse.

For Plato, all earthly experience, such as that of beauty, justice, etc., is dependent on the existence of the Forms[5], as G.M.A. Grube elaborates:

> The theory of 'ideas' is the belief in eternal, unchanging, universal absolutes, independent of the world of phenomena; in, for example, absolute beauty, absolute justice, absolute goodness, from which whatever we call beautiful, just or good derives any reality it may have.[6]

The Forms are eternal and as they exist independently of what is experienced on

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[2] Gregory Vlastos, 'A Metaphysical Paradox', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 39 (1965 - 1966), 5-19 (p. 14).

[3] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by R.E. Allen (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 517b-517c.

[4] It is thought that the idea of Forms was a well known term in contemporary philosophy during Plato's time and thus it barely receives an explanation in the text. In the section titled The Theory of Forms the use of the word 'form' only occurs once.

[5] G.M.A. Grube explains the Theory or Forms or Ideas thus: "Its meaning and scope—for there are Ideas of much more than ethical concepts—will become clear as we proceed, but a warning is necessary at the outset: it is well known, but cannot be too often repeated, that the word Idea in this connexion is a very misleading transliteration, and in no way a translation, of the Greek word ἰδέα which, with its synonym εἶδος, Plato frequently applies to these supreme realities. The nearest translation is 'form' or 'appearance', that is, the 'look' of a person or thing." G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), p. 1.

[6] Grube, p. 1.

earth they require a location. This place was referred to by Plato as 'the intelligible place' in his Allegory of The Cave. As this allegory is well known I will not elaborate in great detail, but a quick retelling of the story is useful to situate the argument.

In Plato's imagined location a group of people are kept tethered at the back of a cave such that they can only see the shadows of puppets and objects which are projected onto the wall in front of them. Everything they see is defined by where it is in relationship to the light source, and what they hear is contextualised by whether sounds accompany the shadows. Through dialogue form Plato's analogy progresses from a fanciful story to a discussion of what is 'true':

> Such prisoners, then, I replied, would not acknowledge as true anything except shadows of artificial objects.
> Quite necessarily, he said.
> Consider then, I replied, what release and healing from the bonds of unwisdom would consist in […] whenever one of them was released, and suddenly compelled to stand upright and turn his head and walk and look upward to the light….What do you suppose he would say, if someone told him that what he had seen before was foolishness, but that now, being somewhat nearer to what is and turned toward more real objects, he would see more correctly? […] Don't you suppose he would be perplexed, at a loss, and believe the things he saw before more true than those pointed out to him now?[7]

Plato opposes truth and perception to show that what is understood to be true is constructed by circumstance. However, regardless of what each person believes to be true, Plato argues that unchanging truth exists and can be grasped. In this example the person who is freed and looks at the whole cave would have no trouble accepting that the shadows were but partial truths – they did correspond to real objects but were unable to show depth, colour, texture, realistic size, etc. Once forced to go above ground the person would have no choice but to

[7] *The Republic*, 515c-515d.

acknowledge that there is a larger reality outside of the cave.[8] The previous understanding of the world would have to be reconciled with radical new concepts of what is real.

Plato hypothesizes that a person who had had such an experience would not want to return to the cave, and, that even if forced to return, would not find it easy to adapt. This is not just an analogy to explain that change in life is difficult. Plato makes sure that this story is understood in relation to larger philosophical debates:

> If you assume that the ascent upward and the vision of things above is the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible place, you will not mistake my surmise […] In the intelligible place, the Idea of the Good is seen finally and with difficulty, but once seen, it must be inferred that it is the cause of all things right and beautiful.[9]

That which is 'right and beautiful' is found above and thus that which is found below is of lesser value. The soul seeks higher and better knowledge and finds it in the intelligible place which is not accessible with the body (for it is 'the soul' that makes the 'ascent upward'). If the Form Good is the source for all things, the nature of everything else is determined by, or flows from the Good. Plato sets up a type of metaphysical determinism necessary for maintaining the structure of belief, i.e. in order to give substance to the intangible focus of belief (the Good), all that is 'right and beautiful,' and tangible is attributed to the Good. Once this attribution has been established, all that is good, right, beautiful and true is dependent on the Good for its existence and its nature. In this way, lived experiences of good things are thought of as representations of the larger, more

[8] "Then I suppose he would have to become accustomed to it, if he is going to see the things above. It would be easier first to look at shadows, next at images in water of men and other things, and afterward at the things themselves; after this, it would be easier to contemplate things in the heaven and the heaven itself by night, and gaze at the light of the stars and the moon, than at the sun and its light by day" (*The Republic*, 516a-516b).

[9] *The Republic*, 517b-517c.

important Good. The association of the experience of good things with the intangible Good is thus what gives rise to a belief in the intangible upon which that which we experience is grounded. The idea of the intangible is produced as a necessary condition for an understanding of the Good.

To agree with the theory of forms is to believe in the forms, as explained in the earlier quotation - the "belief in eternal, unchanging, universal absolutes, independent of the world of phenomena."[10] Plato specifies that it is the soul which is able to ascend to this place, but not the body.[11] The soul and the body, to continue his logic, are two even as they exist together. So the soul extends beyond the body while the person is alive and then leaves the body when the person dies. Alongside the ideas of absolutes Plato sets up further binaries which are concerned with defining the eternal more specifically.

All that is unchanging is real, but the real is not accessible except via the soul.[12] The binaries and the Forms have a direct affect on the body and soul. While aspects of the Forms are experienced through the body, the body itself is part of the material world and only has access to the immaterial and eternal during the time the soul is present in the body. Only the soul is capable of truly participating in the eternal and immaterial. Plato's explanation of the soul provides insight into how he arrived at these distinctions and how he understood the function of salvation. The discussion of the soul in *Phaedrus* offers a clear account of Plato's thought on the question of salvation.

In *Phaedrus* Plato uses a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus about

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[10] As in the introduction belief in this case refers to a trust in something which cannot be seen or known and thus must be believed.

[11] As Plato used the body in opposition to the soul this section applies these words as he would, unless otherwise noted.

[12] This is a simplistic way of explaining the effects of the binaries on the human experience, but it serves to show what kind of divide Plato was trying to achieve for the good of the soul.

the properties of the soul to communicate his ideas. Plato thought that the soul existed from the beginning of the universe, and thus did not come into being when a person was born, nor cease to exist when a person died. In the following section of dialogue Socrates and Phaedrus discuss the immortality of the soul:

> Socrates: All soul is immortal. For that which is always in movement is immortal; that which moves something else, and is moved by something else, in ceasing from movement ceases from living. […] But it is also source and first principle of movement for the other things which move. […] that which moves itself is a first principle of movement. It is not possible for this either to be destroyed or to come into being, or else the whole universe and the whole of that which comes to be might collapse together and come to a halt, and never again have a source from which things will be moved and come to be. And since that which is moved by itself has shown to be immortal […] the soul will necessarily be something that neither comes into being or dies. [13]

This is Plato's rationale for why the soul is immortal when the body is not. His thoughts about motion lead him to posit that the soul cannot have been created; it must always have existed. This also implies that the soul does not change, because it is compared with first principles, such as absolute goodness, beauty and justice, and these do not change. The soul is given an 'eternal home' in this dialogue, i.e. the soul of the individual originated in and will return to 'the intelligible place.' Belief in the metaphysical thus includes the reuniting of the soul with all that is good and right and true.

Plato used the analogy of a wing to explain how the soul accesses the divine:

> Socrates: The natural property of a wing is to carry what is heavy upwards, lifting it aloft to the region where the race of the gods resides, and in a way, of all the things belonging to the sphere of the body, it [the soul] has the greatest share in the divine, the divine being beautiful, wise, good and everything which is of that kind; so it is by these things that the plumage of the soul is nourished and increased most of all, while the shameful, the bad and in general the opposites of the other things make it

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[13] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Christopher Rowe (London: Penguin, 2005), 245c5-246a.

waste away and perish.[14]

Here Plato clearly describes two places: the divine place and the earth. The divine place is what feeds the soul and makes it possible for the soul to continue existing while on earth, where it is exposed to the decay of the material world. The soul needs to ascend, according to Plato, because it has been separated from the divine. It yearns for 'the intelligible place' until the body dies and it can be reunited with the Good. When it is freed from the body (at death) the soul is saved from the problems of earth and delivered to a safe place.

The goal of *Phaedrus* is to posit that souls are equal to, or at least as important as the absolute truths of the universe. The belief in truth, and in salvation as the way to attain truth, remains central to European thought, as evidenced by the recurring of this pattern in religion, politics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, etc.[15] The discussion in *Phaedrus* of the soul existing from the beginning of time provides an example of how Plato explained why salvation was necessary. The soul, while bound to the earth, is missing a piece of itself (access to truth) and yearns to be reunited. When this is accomplished the soul is 'saved' by the truth. To believe in metaphysics is to believe in a spiritual structure which elevates the soul and saves it as the most prized part of human existence. From this point of view, the eternal nature of the soul has two consequences: first, we know, or our souls know, the truth, know the absolute truths in their true form because they (our souls) existed with them (truths) from the beginning; and, secondly, we can only be free when we return to this state, when we can free

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[14] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246d5-246e5.

[15] "It may be, for example, that the 'ultimate' (saving) truth is a truth about oneself that has become obscured, as in psychoanalysis. For others this truth may have to do with political or economic social organization. For some it is the truth that human beings are part of the natural order." Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 45-6.

ourselves from the restrictions of the earth and its appearances.

Much of what Plato wrote sounds quite normal to Western contemporary society, because these ideas have been part of Western culture for so long. As Richard Kraut explains, Plato was the first to present such ideas in a cohesive structure: "Plato's hypothesis that there is an independent realm of noncorporeal, imperceptible, and unchanging entities was a bold and new idea, but it belonged to a tradition of thought that posited the existence of unobtrusive servable but basic realities."[16] Plato was not, however, building a form of religious thinking from scratch and he distinguished between styles of spiritual expression. Vlastos states that Plato was more interested in the depth of a mystical experience than an outward showing of devotion:

> The religion to which he alludes in such contexts is not that blend of high-order patriotic entertainment and white magic which makes up so much of the public cult of the city-state, but that radically different kind of piety, intense, fervent, and other-worldly, fostered by the mystic rites, Bacchic or Eleusinian, the only kind that moved Plato deeply.[17]

An examination of Plato's work therefore needs to take into account the seriousness which he accorded experiences of the metaphysical. This was not simply a structure for Plato but also a tangible experience that should be taken seriously and not as public entertainment.

The view Plato had of spiritual knowledge was different than that of his contemporaries. Charles H. Kahn has emphasized the significance of the change in conceptions of the afterlife that Plato started:

> [Plato's] otherworldly vision is entirely at home in the spiritual atmosphere of late antiquity, in the age of Gnosticism and theurgy. But it would be difficult to overstate the discrepancy between this view of human destiny and the typical attitudes and values of Greek society in the

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[16] Richard Kraut, ed., *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. x.

[17] Vlastos, pp. 14-15. Vlastos discusses Plato's love of the Form of Beauty in greater detail (pp. 13-15). Even if he appreciated some 'rites,' Plato was ultimately focused on the intangible.

fifth and fourth centuries BC.[18]

Human destiny before Plato did not include the idea of the soul, at least not in the amount of detail Plato devotes to the topic, nor the notion of the soul being indestructible, nor the idea of a place for the soul to reside. Kahn elaborates further that for Plato's audience he was a "metaphysical visionary" who was "convinced that the unseen, intangible world, accessible only to rational thought and intellectual understanding, is vastly more meaningful, more precious, and more real than anything we can encounter in the realm of ordinary experience."[19] This is key because it clearly explains that only through "rational thought and intellectual understanding" can someone be saved.[20] Plato conceived of the human being as parts and for him the body did not play a role in thought or understanding.[21] His conviction that the intangible world was where true meaning was created led to the development of what is now called 'salvation theory.'

Soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, is made possible by the structure of Plato's metaphysics, through his conception of a place where the soul is saved. The principle behind soteriology is that humans have lost, or are alienated from, "something of fundamental importance" and salvation is "the means by which that alienation is overcome."[22] Since Plato soteriology has become embedded in Western culture. As Giles Fraser affirms:

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[18] Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1996]), p. 67. Kahn explains in detail what contemporary Greek society was like: "The world we know from Attic tragedy and comedy, from the history of Thucydides and the pleading of the orators, is a world of petty pride, heroic passion, ordinary lust and greed, unlimited ambition and utter ruthlessness. In such a world the metaphysical vision just described seems almost grotesquely out of place," (p. 67).

[19] Kahn, p. 66.

[20] Plato does not use the word 'saved' but readings of his texts have led to the development of salvation theory.

[21] Nancey Murphy comments on the workings of the entire person as a unified whole in *Bodies and Souls or Spirited Bodies?* and Steven R. Guthrie uses balance as a way to explain how there are difference kinds of knowledge and ways of assessing experience in 'Temples of the Spirit: Worship as Embodied Performance.'

[22] Fraser, p. 45.

> This basic soteriological pattern is not limited in use to, nor indeed was it invented by, Christianity. It is at least as old as Plato and as contemporary as the current concern for the environment. These stories, and they are deeply woven into the pattern of European thought, present salvation as 'becoming one with', as 'being one with' something that has been lost, stolen, defaced or forgotten.[23]

Regardless of the reason for the alienation, the 'something' which is always being sought is assumed to be a way of accessing the absolute truth. Each soteriological point of view posits its own reasons for needing truth – truth can be personal, political, environmental, etc. As Fraser explains, "[s]o fundamental is the belief that truth lies at the very centre of human need that few have ever felt the need to question it. Thus the most basic of all soteriological lemmas: the truth will set you free."[24] Yet it is precisely the questioning of truth and truths which is relevant to belief. Plato's writing led to the development of theories whereby salvation is found through the Forms, which was itself an intellectual exercise. But this was entirely dependent on a dualistic formula which has reproduced itself throughout Western history and led to an emphasis being placed on the intangible as it can be accessed by thought.[25] In the following section I consider what happens when this metaphysical and dualistic structure of thought encounters the challenge of a new religious movement with its origins outside the world of Greek philosophy.

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[23] Fraser, p. 45.
[24] Fraser, p. 46.
[25] Plato's ideas were but one aspect or part of Greek philosophy. As Nancey Murphy explains, "It has become common to associate ancient philosophers with something like modern Cartesian Dualism, but this is an oversimplification, first […] because the philosophers of Greece and Rome were not at all united on these issues. Second, it is difficult to think our way back to these ancient sources; we have a fairly precise concept of the material, which allows for a sharp distinction between the material and the non-material. However, one of the contentious issues in ancient philosophy was the nature of matter itself. For many Greek thinkers, reality was conceived of as a hierarchy of beings exhibiting varying degrees of materiality. One important question in ancient philosophy was whether or not the soul belonged to this gradation of material realities. The stoics regarded the human soul as but an aspect of an all-pervading cosmic logos, but Epicureans provided an atomist-materialist account of the soul." Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 11-12.

**Metaphysics and Christianity**

Belief, since the time of Plato, has been explicitly linked with salvation, but both belief and salvation have adapted as other movements and theories have arisen. One aspect of Plato's metaphysical belief which has dominated is the stress he placed on the role of philosophy. He uses philosophy to explain both his ideas and his belief, indeed he relies on them. Logic was at the heart of how he thought and communicated. Vlastos explains the relationship of philosophy to the spiritual for Plato:

> For such a visionary, the domain of unseen reality is the place of origin from which the human spirit or the rational psyche has come, and to which it may under favourable circumstances return. Philosophy is essentially the practice of spiritual liberation by which the rational psyche prepares itself for a successful voyage back to its transcendental homeland.[26]

Together mysticism and rational thought produce the kind of belief system Plato could recommend to others. This was clearly not an embodied spiritual practice.

With the advent of Christianity this logical, philosophically-based belief system met a very differently structured concept of the human person. While overarchingly Christianity can be said to have flourished, the Greek focus on the power of the mind to access the mystical was retained. While the Judeo-Christian tradition conceived of the entire person as one unit that had access to God, the addition of Plato's metaphysical structures led to more emphasis being placed on the mind at the expense of the body.

From the oldest texts used by both Judaism and Christianity there are instructions to worship, to use the body in an embodied way that is not part of Plato's conception. Throughout what Christian tradition calls the Old and New Testaments there appear descriptions and exhortations to actively engage with

[26] Kahn, p. 66.

worship. As Steven R. Guthrie explains,

> [t]he worship of the Old Testament is worship in motion. It is vital, alive, active, and richly sensual. And many of these same activities appear in the New Testament. Singing (Acts 16:25), raising hands (1Timothy 2:8), kneeling (Ephesians 3:14), fasting (Acts 13:2), the sharing of wine and bread (Acts 2:46-7) – all of these are closely associated with the worshiping church. The Apostle Paul even describes the universal affirmation of Christ's lordship in strikingly embodied language: 'at the name of Jesus, *every knee should bow*…and *every tongue confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2:10-11).[27]

The entire person is engaged in embodied practices that link thought, word, speaking, and physical positions of the body to the same origin – the person as a whole. The language in the Old and New Testaments echoes this focus on the physical in descriptions of worship. The word *hishtachaweh* is often used in the Old Testament for worship and also denotes the verb 'to bow down' or 'to prostrate.'[28] The same pattern emerges in the New Testament where the verb 'to worship' (*proskynein*) is also the term used to describe "the oriental custom of bowing down…as a total bodily gesture of respect before a great one."[29] What this points to is the repeated emphasis in the Bible on linking worship "with some sort of bodily activity or gesture – kneeling, singing, raising of hands and so on," and beyond this, that "the idea of worship [is] often described in terms of bodily actions and gestures."[30] While I am not focusing on worship as such, what Guthrie demonstrates is the importance of embodied practices as an active part of the expression of belief necessary to Christian worship.[31]

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[27] Steven R. Guthrie 'Temples of the Spirit: Worship as Embodied Performance', in *Faithful Performances*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 91-107 (p. 97). [Original emphasis.]

[28] Yoshiaki Hattori, quoted in Guthrie, p. 97.

[29] David Peterson, quoted in Guthrie, p. 98.

[30] Guthrie, p. 98.

[31] Actions which appear throughout the Bible (in particular see the Psalms), include the prostration of the body, kneeling, lifting the hands, clapping the hands, shouting, feasting, singing, dancing, processing and the playing of instruments (see Guthrie pp. 96-97.) These behaviours are not undertaken simply because they are enjoyable, but are part of how belief manifests and is sustained, as Steven Guthrie explains:

Much metaphysical thinking seems to fit well with Christian beliefs, e.g. the existence of opposites such as good and evil, heaven and hell. However, although a metaphysical position might seem consistent with contemporary Christianity, Christianity also contains within it a challenge to the metaphysics of Plato. Christianity accords a central position to the physicality and materiality of the body as Nancey Murphy explains:

> Notice that Christians have two strikingly different conceptions of what happens after we die. One is based on dualism: the body dies and the soul departs to be with God. The other is the expectation of bodily resurrection. For centuries these two ideas have been combined. The body dies, the soul departs, and at the end of time the soul receives a resurrected or transformed body.[32]

The dualism that Murphy mentioned here is the same as Plato's, albeit with God

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> Moreover, since in worship we all sing together, we develop a common lexicon of movement and gesture. The music and movement of worship become, not an obstacle, nor a supplement to Christian transformation, but a means and resource for that transforming work. They are not the emotional complement to the rational content of worship, but do themselves fund our conceptual vocabulary. […] But the image into which we are transformed it is not merely that of our own bodies. Rather, as we offer our bodies in worship (musical and of other sorts) we lay hold of resources the Holy Spirit may use to transform us into the image of Christ. These frail and mortal bodies become singing, dancing, kneeling temples; their very gestures and patterns of bodily experience tracing out the dimensions of a space in which the Holy Spirit may live and work. (Guthrie, pp. 106-7)

Contemporary practices continue to place importance on the use of the body. A specific example from Judaism is the celebration of Simchat Torah which as Lauren Winner explains is "the holiday that immediately follows Sukkot, [and] the day Jews set aside to celebrate reading." (Lauren F. Winner, *Girl Meets God* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 20.) On this day the last section of the Torah is read culminating a year of reading through the entire text. The response of the participants is bodily; Winner describes the action:

> Simchat Torah is one of the few times you will find men and women mingled together in an Orthodox synagogue. After *maariv*, the evening prayers, the women come down from their balcony, and all the Torah scrolls are taken out of the ark, and everyone dances them around, scroll by scroll, person by person, making what in Hebrew is called *hakafot*, circling or rings, dancing around the synagogue in a circle that mirrors the circle danced through the Torah each year. As you dance, you pray, *Ana Adonai, hoshia na*. "Oh Lord, save us," The congregation makes seven *hakafot*, seven different circular parades, carrying our scrolling circular book around and around the shul. The *hakafot* can last hours, on and on. (p. 21)

Repetition of actions undertaken as a group are often explained as the outward signs of an inner belief. Yet, as Guthrie discusses, in Christianity "the Holy Spirit of God is revealed as the incarnating Spirit – One who works in and through bodies" (Guthrie, p. 102). The Eucharistic celebration (Communion) is completely based on what happened to Christ's body. The church speaks of itself metaphorically as a body of believers, those who participate in communion say that they 'become one body through his body.' The body is used on many levels and is directly linked to the bodies of the participants through the senses and through metaphor. In Chapter 3, I discuss the role of the body in the performance of the liturgy in more detail.

[32] Murphy, p. 7.

substituted for the Forms, or 'ideal place,' while the second idea of bodily resurrection is derived from Hebraic traditions. So accepted is the idea of dualism in the West that it was only in the twentieth century that scholars first asserted that "dualism was not the original Hebraic understanding."[33] Murphy explains that translations of the Old Testament into English are full of references to the 'soul,' but these are based on translations from the Septuagint – a Greek translation of the text. The word used in Hebrew refers not to a separate soul, but to the entire living person.[34] Thus, salvation would have to include the body because there was no differentiation between parts. Christianity, with its belief that Jesus' body was resurrected from the dead, cannot be thought to agree with Plato's binary of mind/body.[35] Where Plato focuses on and elevates the soul above the body and above physical experiences, Christianity, as expressed in the Bible, does not.[36]

Another structural difference between the two is the source of salvation – for Plato salvation is found in the universe, in absolute Forms, outside of the self,

[33] Murphy, p. 9. Distinctions can, of course, be made between Plato and Descartes and others who have influenced the development of the concept of dualism. I do not elaborate further in this thesis.

[34] "It is widely agreed now that the Hebrew word translated "soul" in all these cases – *nephesh* – did not mean what later Christians have meant by "soul." In most of these cases, it is simply a way of referring to the whole living person. Here is how more recent version translate some of these same passages: Psalm 16:10: (KJV) "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell"; (REB) "for you will not abandon *me* to Sheol…" Psalm 25:20: (KJV) "Oh keep my soul and deliver me"; (NIV) "Guard *my life* and rescue me,"" (Murphy, p. 18).

[35] There is a case to be made that the Bible and Christian theology can accommodate various understandings of salvation, but dualism is difficult to reconcile with the teachings as seen from Murhpy's research: "It would be very bold of me to say that dualism *per se* is ruled out, given that it has been so prominent in the tradition. However, the radical dualisms of Plato and René Descartes, which take the body to be unnecessary for, or even a hindrance to, full human life, are clearly out of bounds," (p. 22).

[36] Murphy's analysis of the New Testament leads her to make the following assertions: "What the New Testament authors *do* attest is, first, that humans are psychophysical unities; second, that Christian hope for eternal life is staked on bodily resurrection rather than an immortal soul" (p. 22) There are other differences and similarities between these two philosophies or belief systems. I choose to focus on the issue of the soul/body because of its explicit connection to salvation and influence on belief. A discussion of the shortcoming of both areas can be found in *After the Death of God* by John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, ed. by Jeffrey W. Robbins, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

whereas, for Christianity salvation is achieved through belief in God who dwells in each person. It is God who is responsible for resurrecting the body, rather than just the soul, at the end of time. This idea of material resurrection goes hand in hand with a personalisation of the metaphysical structure of salvation. Gianni Vattimo explains how Christianity first affected metaphysical thought:

> Christianity accomplished the first attack against metaphysics construed exclusively as objectivity. Accordingly, Kant only taught us centuries later what Christianity had already affirmed, hence the idea of Saint Augustine that *in interiore homine habitat veritas* ("truth lives in the inner human"). Christianity announces the end of the Platonic ideal of objectivity. It cannot be the eternal world of forms outside ourselves that saves us, but only the eye directed toward the interior and the searching of the deep truth inside us all.[37]

Plato's salvation is objective and impersonal whereas Christianity's is subjective and personal. Plato's is concerned with the general idea of the person whereas Christianity addresses the individual's interior being. As we shall see in the next section on language, this subjective, personal nature of Christian salvation influences the language used in the West to discuss salvation and thus shapes how belief is articulated.[38] Now I turn to a consideration of philosophical articulations of these ideas that seeks to challenge the predominance of metaphysical thought in the West, beginning, perhaps inevitably, with the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

**Friedrich Nietzsche**

To say that Western theories of salvation did not sit well with Friedrich Nietzsche would be an understatement. He disagreed with many aspects of belief, but the

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[37] Gianni Vattimo in *After the Death of God*, by John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, ed. by Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 31. This is not an endorsement of the radical Christian position that nothing is required of the person but faith and that once saved all other thoughts, actions or inactions are irrelevant because salvation has been assured.

[38] Differences do exist across Christian denominations and sects as to what constitutes salvation, when it will occur, and exactly how the body and soul will be affected.

concept that the soul was eternal and could ascend to ‘heaven’ was especially problematic, as he states in *Beyond Good and Evil* (*BGE*): “that belief which regards the soul as being something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*: *this* belief ought to be ejected from science!”[39] As we have seen, both Western Christianity and metaphysics believe the soul to be eternal, albeit in slightly different ways. The salvation of the soul in Plato’s thought took the form of what Michael Tanner calls a “completely worked-out system, which […] was regarded by Nietzsche as the hideous perfection of optimism in its positing of a world more real than this one, a world immune to change, and thus to decay and death.”[40] It was inconceivable for Nietzsche that eternity would not include change given that everything else in the universe was obviously subject to constant reordering. Stephen Houlgate has commented on the reoccurrence of this theme throughout Nietzsche’s work: “Nietzsche’s thinking was dominated by the conviction that everything has its origins in time and history, and that consequently everything in the world is finite and is destined to be destroyed.”[41] Clearly this opinion is in opposition to the idea of an ‘intelligible place’ or ‘heaven.’ There was no room in Nietzsche’s concept of existence for this kind of salvation. His low opinion of both systems is evident in his comment that “Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’,” suggesting that anyone who believed in such structures was being deceived.[42]

Nietzsche is perhaps best known for his attack on Christianity. This attack was not simply that of an atheist who did not like the idea of God; his

[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin, 2003), 12 p. 43.
[40] Michael Tanner, ‘Introduction’, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. by Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 2003), pp.7-26 (pp. 9-10).
[41] Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 39.
[42] Nietzsche, *BGE*, p. 32.

philosophical objections to Christianity were strongly linked to its metaphysical presuppositions and its views of salvation. These objections then extended into a critique of the concept of 'truth.' He specifically problematises the belief in truth in *Will to Power* (*WP*): "The entire Christian teaching as to what shall be believed, the entire Christian "truth," is idle falsehood and deception: and precisely the opposite of what inspired the Christian movement in the beginning."[43] Here Nietzsche singles out truth as the focus of belief, which became his key to dismantling the structure of both Christianity and metaphysics.[44]

A common method for arguing against religion is to question the 'truth' of God's existence. Nietzsche's approach was rather more comprehensive: he questioned the truth of 'truth' itself. God falls away as a by-product of the attack on truth. As Giles Fraser explains:

> Nietzsche's line of attack, however, is to challenge the other pole of that alliance [God and truth] and question the ultimate value of truth. This line is potentially just as devastating to religion, but is equally, and by the same token, just as potentially devastating to the interests of traditional philosophy; for, if successful, it undermines the very means by which the philosophical atheist seeks to challenge religion.[45]

The foundation of philosophy is Nietzsche's focus and in the end his ideas implicate philosophy as much as Christianity. His critique of philosophy was that it too caused problems that led to untenable dogma. As he explains, the problems always begin "as soon as a philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to 'creation of the world',

[43] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 159 p. 98.
[44] Nietzsche did not try to destroy every aspect of Western beliefs: "Between ourselves, it is not at all necessary by that same act to get rid of 'the soul' itself and thus forgo one of the oldest and most venerable hypotheses." Nietzsche, *BGE*, 12 p. 43.
[45] Fraser, p. 63.

to *causa prima*."[46] For Nietzsche, if the system, whether philosophy or theology, was the problem then the system had to change.

Against this criticism of the truth espoused by philosophers Nietzsche offers his own definition:

> "Truth" is therefore not something out there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined.[47]

To undermine conceptual binaries Nietzsche articulates a more fluid truth that could not be universal, eternal, absolute, etc. He resituates truth as something which each person discovers through a process, "an active determining." L.P. Thiele explains this process with artistic metaphors: "In the absence of God, the redemption of life rests with man; he must behold himself as a work of art, as his own creation. He must become both the playwright and spectator of the ongoing drama of his will in the world."[48] Truth in this understanding must be conceived of by the individual in relation to personal experience and beliefs; truth is ever changing as the person changes. Nietzsche's ideal was that a person could create himself through becoming himself and in this process find truth(s).

While the control of the development of truth rested with the individual, for Nietzsche the drive for truth originated neither in the person nor in the universe.  He questioned why truth was the focus of Western philosophy and the world around him: "The zeal and subtlety, I might say even slyness, with which the problem 'of the real and apparent world' is set up on all over Europe today

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[46] Nietzsche, *BGE*, 9 p. 39.
[47] Nietzsche, *WP*, 552 p. 289.
[48] L.P. Thiele*, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 137.

makes one think hard and prick up ones ears."[49] This metaphysical thinking was, according to Nietzsche, insidious because it spread without people realising what they were believing. Even when people claimed to no longer believe in God Nietzsche remained unconvinced by assertions that they were free agents. He did not see a possible escape from the history of Western thought: "They pose as having discovered and attained their real opinions through the self-evolution of a cold, pure, divinely unperturbed dialectic."[50] Nietzsche saw that the structure of metaphysics had infiltrated culture and language to such an extent that people were blind to the effects.

On the one hand, Nietzsche objects to Christianity and the version of redemption espoused in the nineteenth century. On the other, he attacks metaphysics as the vehicle for values he disagreed with, as well as for its own structure of flawed redemption. Nietzsche identifies Plato's metaphysics as having shaped Western thought and language to such an extent that the ideas and values of Christianity, which had since come to be almost indissoluble from metaphysics, could no longer be taken out of Western culture even through a process of secularisation. Even if religious practices and beliefs disappeared altogether, the foundation of Western culture itself was already so dependent on such ideas for the very structures of its language and thought that it would be impossible to break free.

Nietzsche rejects accepted norms and addresses the structural problems of the system by forcing the discussion away from another argument about appearance and reality. If truth is not at the centre, if it cannot save, then the structure of the Forms or the idea of God, along with the location – an intelligible

[49] Nietzsche, *BGE*, 10 p. 40.
[50] Nietzsche, *BGE*, 5 p. 36.

place or heaven – are thrown into question. If truth is changeable, the rest of the structure falls apart with nothing at the centre of the belief and thus no prospect of salvation through truth. Nietzsche's project was thus to find a way for salvation to exist in the philosophical uncertainty of a world that changes; how is it possible to be saved if the parameters for salvation are also subject to change? In contrast with Plato's version which has truth as an absolute which can never be questioned, Nietzsche wants to know why humans put such value on truth: "*What* really is it in us that wants 'the truth'?" Nietzsche asks.[51]

What Nietzsche articulated has proven to be both controversial and incredibly fruitful for philosophers of many persuasions, notably, Jacques Derrida who returned to the root of metaphysics in his writings, and much of whose work constitutes an ongoing dialogue with Plato.[52] This next section continues the thread of metaphysics adding perhaps the most significant challenge to it: deconstruction.

**Jacques Derrida**

Greek metaphysics was articulated by Plato, folded into Christianity and critiqued by Nietzche. Where Nietzsche failed to find a way to dismantle metaphysics the work of Jacques Derrida has both an answer and a suggestion to the philosophical problem. He posits that metaphysics cannot be escaped from, but that there is a way to exist within in and comment on it. In response he articulates a process of reversal and re-inscription which he calls deconstruction:

> What interested me then, that I am attempting to pursue along other lines now, was… a kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*. [This] is to

[51] Nietzsche, *BGE*, 1 p. 33.
[52] Among others, Heidegger's take on Nietzsche is well known, but has been criticised by critical theory, specifically Derrida in 'Nietzsche and the Machine: Interview with Jacques Derrida by Richard Beardsworth', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 7 (1994), 7-66 (pp. 25-26).

> avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it.[53]

Deconstruction, as Derrida explains it here, acknowledges the problems of metaphysics and seeks to unsettle the oppositions instead of simply refuting or accepting them. Throughout his writing Derrida insistes that deconstruction is not a method. He often describes or demonstrates how he undertakes the deconstruction of a text, but refuses to define deconstruction itself. In *Positions* he explains that the structure of metaphysics requires the overturning of hierarchies as well as a systematic analysis to reveal the interdependency of the oppositions. Here he focuses on the idea of overturning instead of replacing one idea with another:

> [We] must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively.[54]

Derrida is concerned with effecting a critique of metaphysics that does not simply rearrange the oppositions for a limited period of time.

He identifies how in each pairing of two terms there is an inequality which gives one term more power than the other. Overturning the hierarchies is a way to engage in an analysis without tacitly agreeing with the nature of the system. The analysis has to effect something and yet the structure of metaphysics works against any lasting reordering. Derrida explains that the analysis, once started,

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[53] Derrida, *Positions* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 41. [Original emphasis.]
[54] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 41. [Original emphasis.]

had to continue indefinitely, because oppositions want to exist in tandem and will realign themselves according to the preexisting hierarchy. Derrida sought to shift the structure of metaphysics itself and the only way he could conceive of this was through a series of adjustments to allow for the whole system to be reconceptualised:

> We know what always have been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately* jumping *beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither* this *nor* that. When I say that this phase is necessary, the word *phase* is perhaps not the most rigorous one. It is not a question of a chronological phase, a given moment, or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things. The necessity of this phase is structural; it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself.[55]

In this way Derrida emphasizes that attempting to get beyond binary oppositions is an ongoing project that will no doubt continue. His insistence on understanding the project of deconstruction as a process also shows that any analysis of these attempts will reestablish the original structure.

In Derrida's reading, each of Plato's binary oppositions becomes the context for an investigation of the two terms and the spectrum on which they operate. Instead of seeing them as fixed positions far apart in meaning, a series of theoretical moves highlights their inter-relatedness. What Derrida alters through his strategy of deconstruction is the relationship of the concept to its opposite. The rethinking of difference between, e.g. reality/appearance is thus approached in a new way in Western philosophy. Barbara Johnson explains the results of working with such a strategy:

> These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc. In other words, the two terms are not simply opposed in their

[55] Derrida, *Positions*, pp. 41-2. [Original emphasis.]

> meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term *priority*, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word.[56]

Derrida affirms the impossibility of doing away with metaphysical thought by showing that the system relies on its own categorisations.

It would seem that if Plato invented it, we ought to be able to stop using it, but it is part of Derrida's contention that everything we think, say, write and do in the West has been so firmly built on the structure of metaphysical thinking that we are effectively incapable of even conceiving of a world without this system:

> But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[57]

Derrida's conclusion about our capacity to escape the influence of Western metaphysics is that we cannot; language and its users are trapped in a circle. The circle is circumscribed by the history of metaphysical thought and there is no way to break through. The kind of critique Derrida facilitates operates in conjunction with the inherent problem. The person effecting the critique can thus see the structure of the concept as well as the logics the structure depends on in order to function, but is unable to work outside the system.[58] Instead of simply trying to

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[56] Barbara Johnson, 'Introduction', in *Dissemination* by Jacques Derrida, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. vii- xxxiii (p. viii).
[57] Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001 [1978]), pp. 351-370 (p. 354).
[58] Derrida connected the problems of metaphysics and deconstruction with the arts and performance as well. As already discussed in the Introduction, in his essay on Antonin Artaud's ideas Derrida positions some art as being able to attempt to at least look at metaphysics differently: "The theatre of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. […] Is not the most naïve form of representation *mimesis*? Like Nietzsche—and the affinities do not end there—Artaud wants to have done with the *imitative* concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own. "Art is not the imitation of life, but life is the imitation of a transcendental principle which art puts us into communication with once again."" Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of

take apart the flawed structure, deconstruction simultaneously questions the entire foundation of the logic– in other words, disabling the relationships as well as the rationale which were previously stable.[59] Even if we accept that Derrida, and others, have changed the awareness of the "unique" circle of metaphysics we are still trapped by more than just binaries.[60]

Where Nietzsche tried to rework the existence of truth and salvation in relation to belief, Derrida was more subtle and more severe at the same time. Deconstruction admits its inability to make meaning outside metaphysical structures, but simultaneously calls the structure into question at every turn. Belief is thus affirmed as a part of Western thinking while concurrently limited as a viable form of meaning. What Nietzsche and Derrida have done is to provide us with alternative ways of understanding the structure of belief and salvation. They have shown the extent to which metaphysical thought is embedded in linguistic and cognitive structures. Their critiques highlight the innate problems of building a belief system upon binaries which are inherently co-dependent.

The discussions enabled by Nietzsche and Derrida are by no means finished as philosophy and theology continue to debate the nature and influence of metaphysics. Recent scholarship in theology, for example, has been engaging with developments in neuroscience and physics in relation to discussions of the

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Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001 [1978]), pp. 232-250 (p. 234).

[59] Derrida's famous example of deconstruction using Plato's work is from *Phaedrus* and published in *Dissemination*. The word pharmakon is used by Plato in Greek and the word is variously translated within *Phaedrus* as either 'remedy' or 'poison.' Derrida's analysis looks critically at the problems of Plato's binaries, translation, and writing in Western philosophy. See Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 67-186.

[60] In *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), Derrida analyses Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* and writes extensively about the relationship between Christianity and Platonism. A concern of Patočka's is that the Christian 'self' has not been sufficiently thought through. In the passage from one system to the other, in this case from Platonism to Christianity, there is always a failure to realise what has been lost and what has been gained.

soul, in ways which seem to extend, in the field of religious studies, some of the implications of the philosophical critique of metaphysics. Christian philosopher Nancey Murphy posits another way of addressing the problems of binary thought by dispensing with dualism within the human:

> My central thesis is this, first, that we are our bodies – there is no additional metaphysical element such as a mind or soul or spirit. But, second, this "physicalist" position need not deny that we are intelligent, moral, and spiritual. We are, at our best, complex physical organisms, imbued with the legacy of thousands of years of culture, and, most importantly, blown by the Breath of God's Spirit; we are *Spirited Bodies*.[61]

Murphy's interdisciplinary research, incorporating Biblical texts, Christian theology, anthropology and philosophy, as well as scientific research, is clearly in line with contemporary developments in other fields. Performance theory in particular has taken up non-dualistic ideas concerning the body from many perspectives, but until now has not engaged with current theological research.[62] Murphy's approach is also concerned with physicality and materiality, both that which is experienced in ritual, but also that of a believer who believes that the presence of God is felt by and through the entire person.

From this philosophical section I now move on to look concretely at the other part of Derrida's question – the importance of language in understanding religion and the sacred. Language is how we communicate what we think about belief, and therefore needs to be analysed for its role in articulating what it means to believe.

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[61] Murphy, p. ix.

[62] Work that discusses the body in a non-dualist manner includes Bert O. States, 'The Phenomenological Attitude', in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. by J.G. Reinelt and J.R. Roach (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 369-379; and Herbert Blau, *Take up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

**SPEAKING BELIEF: PHILOSOPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

> *We believe we can pretend to believe [...] that we share in some pre-understanding. We act as though we had some common sense of what "religion" means through the languages that we believe (how much belief already, to this moment, to this very day!) we know how to speak. We believe in the minimal trustworthiness of this word.*[63]

Language has the difficult job of explaining and communicating the intricacies of belief. Given the inherent problems of explaining belief through language, as we have seen in the work of Nietzsche and Derrida, an investigation into language itself is necessary. In this section I examine research by anthropologists in order to expand the discussion to include concrete examples of language use in various cultures. Through a combination of case studies and linguistic theory these writers have approached the same problem from a different angle than philosophy. They also show how the religious practices and beliefs of a society influence language as much as language influences belief. Interest in the influence of belief is evident in publications from various decades, e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss ('La structure des mythes,'1955[64]), Rodney Needham (*Belief, Language and Experience*, 1972), and Fenella Cannell (*The Anthropology of Christianity*, 2006). The focus here is in language as it is used and applied by anthropologists.

With increasing frequency anthropologists have undertaken critical analyses of their own field. In his book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith identifies a bias that often surfaces in anthropological research – the Christian understanding of religion has been cast as primarily a question of belief. And this has been the default point of comparison used to

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[63] Jacques Derrida 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone,' in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 42-10 (p. 44). [Original emphasis.]

[64] This article was published in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958).

analyse cultures and religions. Smith identifies the assumption that understanding belief is primary to understanding a culture:

> The peculiarity of the place given to Christian history is a monumental matter, whose importance and relative uniqueness must be appreciated. So characteristic has it been that unsuspecting Westerners have...been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own as well, 'What do they believe?' as though this were the primary question, and certainly were a legitimate one.[65]

When the term belief is applied uncritically to other cultures and languages problems arise in interpretation and analysis that misrepresent the practices observed.[66] Examinations of older research reveal biases, and the influence of both metaphysical and Christian logics.

Faced with this problem anthropologists in the 1970s and early 1980s began to engage with belief from many angles, trying to understand the genealogy of anthropological approaches. As Rodney Needham explains in his book *Belief, Language and Experience*,

> the notion of belief is not appropriate to an empirical philosophy of mind or to an exact account of human motives and conduct. Belief is not a discriminable experience, it does not constitute a natural resemblance among men, and it does not belong to 'the common behaviour of mankind.'[67]

Needham found through his own research that belief is different for every society and that comparisons between the beliefs of different cultures are of doubtful

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[65] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978[1962]), p. 180. The reasons that Smith offered for belief being taken for granted include the role of Greek philosophy in Western 'reason,' which leads to belief being rationalised and the problematic use of the verb 'to believe' to represent the term 'faith.' It is on this distinction that most of his argument hinged in all three books published around this time: *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1978 [1962]), *Believing – An Historical Perspective* (1998 [1977]) and *Faith and Belief* (1979).

[66] This is discussed in detail in the second part of the Chapter 1.

[67] Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972). p. 188. Needham concluded that belief had not been adequately examined by ethnography in relation to human experience and action. His book is interesting as it attempted to look at philosophy, linguistics and anthropology but the sections on other cultures and how belief is or is not relevant to their practices did not go into much detail. Overall there was more of a focus on philosophical debates than on anthropological case studies. While he did include a history of the linguistic uses of belief in the West it was quite brief. Needham's work was part of a larger project in anthropology which included writers such as E.E. Evans-Prichard and was heavily influenced by linguistic theorist Émile Beneviste.

value. There is no basis from which to study belief cross-culturally and thus it cannot be used to accurately explain behaviour.

Both Smith and Needham felt that anthropologists ought to take responsibility for clarifying their own belief systems before attempting to describe those of other cultures. But how is it possible to explain an experience which as Needham said, is not 'discriminable'? Malcolm Ruel and Jean Pouillon used detailed accounts of language usage as one way to address the problem. They found that, at the very least, it is possible to assert that there is more than one way to conceptualise belief and its relationship to human action. To assume that all cultures 'believe' in the same way as in the West is to mistake the Western understanding for a universal paradigm. They both explain through linguistic and cultural examples why it is not possible to transpose the Western system onto other cultures.

In his article 'Christians as Believers' Malcolm Ruel chooses to focus on the linguistic roots of belief in the Hebraic and Hellenistic traditions as a way to then account for contemporary usage of the concept.[68] He structures his arguments around a discussion of fallacies which have developed about belief in Western culture:

> "(1) That belief is central to all religions in the same way as it is to Christianity."
> "(2) That the belief of a person or a people form the ground of his or their behaviour and can be cited therefore as a sufficient explanation for it."
> "(3) That belief is fundamentally an interior state, a psychological condition."
> "(4) That the determination of belief is more important than the determination of the status of what it is that is the object of belief."[69]

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[68] Although the Hebrew, Greek and English words do not have the same meaning, or even a constant meaning, Ruel argued that, "their range of meaning is historically and semantically continous." Malcolm Ruel, 'Christians as Believers', in *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, ed. by J. Davis (London: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 9-31 (pp. 10-11).
[69] Ruel, pp. 27-8. [Each line listed above is the first of a longer paragraph in which Ruel develops the separate points.]

Numbers 2-4 might seem familiar because they have already been discussed, albeit in slightly different form, in the Introduction (pages 30-32). Talal Asad argues that ritual has been treated as a symbolic activity that expresses a deeper belief functioning as an "outward sign" of the "inward meaning." This was deemed to be a simplistic and unworthy understanding of ritual and the beliefs associated with. Number 1 was not addressed in the Introduction and it is where Ruel focuses for most of his essay.[70] Starting with two of the languages used to write and translate the earliest version of the Bible – Hebrew and Greek – he traces the history of the term belief in relation to English. While most of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with some Aramaic), it was translated into Greek, Latin and then into English centuries later. It is through the Greek translations that the text became part of Western cultures.[71] Both the Hebrew *'mn* and the Greek *pisteuo* "express centrally the notion of trust or confidence."[72] It is from these words that the function of 'belief' in the Bible was established and our contemporary understanding is continuous with this history. Clearly these concepts are still part of belief today, but the term has more associations than most people realise.

What Ruel, and others, highlighted was not simply the etymological roots of a word, but the development of a concept that was unique to the earliest Christian societies. The name the earliest Christians chose to call themselves, as recorded by the texts in the New Testament, was 'believers.' The term thus

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[70] For more on this problem see Ruel, pp.10-23. As Ruel explains, in the West discussions of religion "slip from talking about religion to talking about Christianity, and back again, without clear distinction", (p. 27). This, at the most basic level, shows the degree to which Christianity is taken to be the norm in the West.

[71] More and more scholarship is appearing which focuses on the influence not only of Greek language but Greek philosophy on the translations of the Bible. It is argued that the word soul only appears in the current Bible because of the influence of the Greek translations. For more on this see Nancey Murphy, pp. 16-22.

[72] Ruel, p. 11.

acquired "a technical use" to identify a group of people who believed in a specific person, in a specific manner.[73] Where some groups congregate around an activity or an interest, this group based its membership on an event and a person which altered the nature of religious belief at the time. It was through conversion that people became 'believers' and the New Testament is full of various uses of the term including "those believing," "those of the belief," and importantly, an explanation of the "identifying features" of believers from the book of Ephesians 4:4-5 "one Lord, one belief, one baptism."[74] Activities undertaken by the group grew out of the belief, not the other way around. Belief was thus a shared, collective experience that was based not just on what Jesus said, but what was claimed about him – that he was raised from the dead. In other words, belief was related not just to a god who existed and in whom trust could be placed, but in an event and a god who had acted. Belief itself was therefore descriptive (they have belief in God and Jesus and the resurrection), and active (I believe in/that…) in relation to a precise moment in time. The performative nature of belief is twofold; it can be expressed as a performative verb 'I believe…' or belief can be understood as a performative process in a similar manner to gender or ethnicity. I take these ideas up in the next section in relation to the work of Judith Bulter and others.

Ruel explains that historically the connection of belief to the resurrection made belief both the acceptance of a fact (the resurrection) and the "assertion of a proposition."[75] Thus, 'believers' believed *in* Jesus Christ and they believed *that* he died and rose again. Belief was not just one aspect of the religion, it was the core concept without which a person could not belong; it became "a badge, a

[73] Ruel, p. 12. The term Christians was applied by the Jews to the new group.
[74] Ruel, p. 12.
[75] Ruel, p. 12.

symbol, something that is explicitly affirmed where the act of affirmation has its own functional value."[76] Membership in society was defined by beliefs, in this case religious beliefs. The value of belief is evident in the history of the church through the centuries in the creeds, baptism, etc. So central was belief to the culture of Christianity that to deny belief set a person outside of society; it was a moral as well as a social statement. To deny belief was "to deny the Word of God, that is, the action of God in the world."[77] Refuting belief was not simply to disagree with an opinion but to question the entire relationship of God to humans. This belief as described by Ruel is performative in that it constitutes more than a simple opinion; it defines the user and is understood as integral to their actions as well as their thoughts.

Belief went from being an expression of 'trust or confidence,' to having a technical use, defining those who believed in Jesus, explaining the specific kind of belief necessary to being a Christian, as well as being an affirmation of membership, and the name of the group – 'the believers.' Contemporary usage, Smith explains, is still affected by this history and 'unsuspecting Westerners' do simply not realise "how rooted the concept [of belief] is in our own cultural religious tradition, Christian and post-Christian, and thus how loaded any statement concerning "belief" easily becomes."[78] While the majority of people in contemporary Western society no longer participate in the Christian religion the uses of the term belief and its cognates still reflect its religious heritage.

These examples have all served to show that there is more embedded in language than we are often aware. While Ruel is focused on a mostly theoretical discussion, Jean Pouillon uses concrete examples of language usage, which I will

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[76] Ruel, p. 13.
[77] Ruel, p. 12.
[78] Ruel, p. 9.

introduce in a moment. However, it is necessary to first discuss the somewhat blinkered view we have come to have of belief in what we assert is a secular society.

The importance of belief as a core concept in Western culture did not disappear with the rise of secular culture:

> "Believing" in the sense of being committed to some definable set of values has become secularized, detached from Christian believing but not demoted as a concept, so that in a post-Christian, secular culture the phrase "I believe..." [...] still gives promise of a personal statement of some significance, a declaration of moral identity.[79]

There are, of course, various ways to use the word 'believe' and some are less important than others, e.g. 'I believe he is coming at two o'clock' is a weak use of the word, as Ruel explains:

> …the word [belief] is current English and in this its weak sense is not likely to be misunderstood. It is when the word is given a strong sense that it may well mislead: for example, when it forms part of a definition or categorization or is used in posing a problem. Here I would argue that it is almost impossible not to draw on connotations from its Christian use. Moreover, these connotations, contextually transposed, create false assumptions that then lead to fallacies.[80]

In other words, when belief is used in important situations its history comes into play, even if the person using it is not aware of this history. The word is chosen because it carries with it a range of meanings and history of usage.

The first fallacy identified by Ruel, that belief is as central to all religions as it is to Christianity, is related to the problems with metaphysics addressed by Derrida. Belief is central to Christianity both because of the linguistic reasons outlined by Ruel, but also because of the history of Western thought as discussed in the previous section. Indeed, Derrida with his word-based overthrow of binaries showed the constructed nature of language. Because belief is so central

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[79] Ruel, pp. 9-10.
[80] Ruel, p. 27.

to the philosophical and religious structure in the West it is hard to imagine how another system might function. Thus, to assume that other cultures 'believe' as we 'believe' is natural. Yet, as Jean Pouillon demonstrates, this is a problematic assumption to have.

Pouillon's article, 'Remarks on the Verb "To Believe",' addresses Ruel's first fallacy from yet another point of view, linking grammar with philosophy. Pouillon examines the chronic problem of the anthropologists' treatment of 'belief' as a constant:

> What anthropologist would deny that he seeks to uncover the beliefs of those whom he studies, to compare them with our own beliefs or those of other peoples, as if this object of study and its designation presented no a priori problem, as if it were obvious that every human being "believes" [...] – this being one of our beliefs–in the same way, if not, of course, in the same things?[81]

It is human nature to analyse experiences in relation to the known – but in the case of belief it has become a stumbling block to understanding other cultures. Through the philosophy of language, as well as an example from a case study, Pouillon begins his discussion of the French verb 'croire' (to believe), with a detailed analysis of the potential meaning of each manifestation of 'to believe' (to believe in, to believe that, to believe with a direct or indirect object). Using another language as a comparison, in this case Dangaleat, which is spoken in northern Chad, Pouillon shows that while every *meaning* of 'to believe,' whether 'in' or 'that,' can be translated into Dangaleat, the verb itself cannot.[82] That is, the verb as it is used in French cannot be translated because there is no one term in Dangaleat which means the same things in the same variety as in French. Other

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[81] Jean Pouillon, 'Remarks on the Verb "To Believe"', in *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History, and Myth*, ed. by Michael Izard and Pierre Smith, trans. by John Leavitt (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1-8 (p. 4).

[82] Ideas from this section have appeared in: Megan Macdonald, 'The Liturgical Lens: Performance Art and Christianity', *Performance Research: On Congregation*, 13.3 (2008), 146-153.

European languages, including French, have a unique way of containing many religious and spiritually significant ideas in one word. Pouillon shows in his detailed examination the extent to which linguistic structures are reinforced by Western understandings and preconceptions about belief.

The unity that exists in the Western European languages is (for this pattern is also true of English and German, etc.) unique. Cultures with other belief structures have different linguistic structures as well. The fact that the single term 'belief' needs to be translated into a group of expressions in other languages invites the question – what is it about belief which allows all the meanings to be contained by one word in the West? Belief, as we have already seen in Ruel's work, is obviously related to religion, and in this sense Pouillon's conclusions are not that surprising. Pouillon goes a step further, however, looking at how the religious practices of two cultures are informed by language.

To make his argument Pouillon analyses contemporary usages of 'to believe' in French, noting when they pointed to a religious past, as well as to other associations. He begins by listing the most obvious of the usages (these correspond well to their English equivalents);

– *croire à* – to state that something exists; 'to believe in the Devil' [this does not require the person to put their 'belief' in the Devil, only to believe in the existence of the Devil']
– *croire en* – to have confidence or faith; 'to believe in (trust in) God'
– *croire que* – for something to be represented a certain way; 'to believe that God exists'[83]

In all of these examples, it is of course also possible to ascribe belief to situations involving other people, e.g. to put faith in a person, to believe that *someone* is *something*. The difference between the three kinds of belief listed above is sometimes subtle and thus meaning is determined in the speaking by both speaker

[83] Pouillon, p. 2. [Original emphasis.]

and hearer. As he develops his argument Pouillon elaborates on the first definitions adding:

- *croire en* – to give someone credit 'to believe what someone says'
- *croyance en* – trust in a god such that there is a *credo*, "a group of statements which become the direct object of belief."[84]

Belief, in the examples above, can refer to existence, trust, confidence, credit, or to a representation, or the development of a creed.

All these meanings can be understood by the use of one word, as Pouillon demonstrates:

> "*Croyance en* ["belief in, trust in"] God does imply *croyance à* ["belief in"] his existence, but implication is not identity. On the other hand, this implication seems so obvious that it often goes unformulated: a believer believes in [*croire en*, "trusts in"] God, he feels no need to say that he believes in [*croire à*] God's reality; he believes in [*croire à*] it, one would say implicitly. […] If I have confidence in a friend, if I belief in [*croire en*, "have faith in"] him, will I say that I believe in [*croire à*] his existence? Certainly not; that existence is, simply, undeniable. It is only if it were not unquestionable that I would have to believe [*croire à*] it, and believe in it explicitly. …it will probably be said that this is playing on words.[85]

The meanings held within the term create an internal uncertainty at the same time as they are being used to affirm belief. To claim 'belief in' or 'belief that' is to acknowledge that others might 'believe in' other things, or 'believe that' God does not exist. It is possible in these constructions to affirm the existence of *something* without affirming belief in the *something*, as in the example of the Devil.

Another way Pouillon explains the language of belief is in relation to "the certain and the questionable" – the division in Western thinking between man and God, or as Plato would put it, between appearance and reality:

[M]an's existence by definition, is not on the same level as that of the

[84] Pouillon, p. 3. [Pouillon separates these examples from the others and I have followed his structure in my presentation of his ideas. Original emphasis.]
[85] Pouillon, p. 2. [Original emphasis.]

> deity. […] It is this distinction between two modes of existence that leads to a distinction between two ways of apprehending what exists: perception and knowledge on one side, belief…on the other. From this kind of perspective, the existence of supernatural beings can only be an object of belief, and this is why wherever this distinction is made the phenomenon of belief as the affirmation of existence takes on this ambiguous aspect, between the certain and the questionable.[86]

The distinction is between not only what is 'known' and what is 'believed' but also that the 'known' is linked with the natural world and that the 'believed' is part of the spiritual world. Pouillon clearly explains that it is the Western division between "modes of existence" echoed in the linguistic construction which allows for the possibility of doubt even in an affirmation of belief in the supernatural. The manner of expressing the belief is directly linked to the kind of belief held by the culture, "that, above all, there is always doubt at the heart of conviction."[87] It is the Christian separation of 'known' and 'believed' or 'appearance' and 'reality' that makes doubt a natural part of belief. Doubt is possible in the usage of belief because of the linguistic construction itself; this is not true of every belief system.

Pouillon analyses the linguistic uses of belief to explain the differences between Western and other cultural approaches, showing how the philosophical idea finds representation in language. The application of Western ideas to case studies from other cultures includes the application of linguistic structures and logics. This highlights the problem of cultural specificity. By necessity anyone seeking to understand another culture or language must use their mother tongue to make sense of the new. What has been problematic are analyses that fail to acknowledge that the two cultures in question might not share similar linguistic forms, philosophies, structures and logics. An example of this comes from a series of lectures given in 1962 by anthropologist E.E. Evans Pritchard who

[86] Pouillon, p. 2.
[87] Pouillon, p. 5.

comments that Western anthropologists had attributed beliefs to the cultures they studied, which made sense to the Western view, but had nothing to do with the cultures' views. While discussing the problem of translation he uses the understanding of witchcraft as an example[88]:

> We use the word 'supernatural' when speaking of some native form of belief, because that is what it would mean for us, but far from increasing our understanding of it, we are likely by the use of this word to misunderstand it. […] [T]he word 'supernatural' conveys to us something outside the ordinary operation of cause and effect, but it may not at all have that sense for primitive man. For instance, many peoples are convinced that deaths are caused by witchcraft. To speak of witchcraft being for these peoples a supernatural agency hardly reflects their own view of the matter, since from their point of view nothing could be more natural. They experience it through the senses in deaths and other misfortunes, and the witches are their neighbours. Indeed, for them, if a person did not die from witchcraft, it might be better said, at least in a certain sense, that he did not die a natural death, and that to die from witchcraft is to die from natural causes."[89]

The preconceptions of the anthropologist, and not the beliefs of those studied, can significantly alter the presentation of a case study.

Not every language allows these elements to coexist in one word, as shown by Pouillon's examples from Dangaleat. For the Hadjeraï, who speak Dangaleat and 'believe in' spirits called the margaï, there are multiple ways of expressing what we would call belief. In an example drawn from a dictionary Pouillon explains the variants of 'belief' in Dangaleat:

> …we find the verb *àbidé* "to perform the rites faithfully." It comes from the local Arabic *abada*, "to adore God," adoration being understood as a ritualized activity. It is a matter of worship…of faith in action, and not of the representation of a being whose existence must also be affirmed. This verb is used with a direct-object complement: this being God for converts to Christianity or Islam, or the *margaï* for others. The best way to translate it is thus "to serve," in the biblical sense of the term: to worship….*No*

[88] The quotation from E.E. Evans-Pritchard does not specify a specific country but Evans-Pritchard's work in various countries often mentioned witchcraft. See *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) and *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[89] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 109-110.

*abday maragi*, “I serve the *margay*.”[90]

This is but one word in their language which was translated into French as believe. Here, to believe in these spirits is sometimes to serve them, but not necessarily ‘to serve’ as a Christian would understand what it means to serve in the mono-theistic tradition. To serve could mean to pray regularly, to worship, to trust, to tell others about the belief, etc. To believe in God in the Western understanding of the Christian God does include the idea of serving God, but this God is personal and not a conglomeration of various spirits. The kind of serving implied by the statement “I believe in God” is different to that implied by “I believe in spirits.” The Hadjeraï relationship to the word belief, according to the above quotation, is accurately translated as ‘believe’ insofar as serving is what is being discussed, but not in terms of the kind of deity they serve. Problems arise when this is not explained, leading to misunderstandings for the Western reader of an anthropological text on the Hadjeraï. To say that they believe in spirits and thus serve the spirits is still too vague because the understanding of ‘to serve,’ in this case, is dependent on what belief entails for the Western reader.

Pouillon criticises translations from Dangaleat which make it seem that they ‘believe’ in the *margaï*, yet their ‘belief’ is quite different than the above description of two modes of existence:

> they believe in [croire à] the existence of the *margaï* like they believe in their own existence, in that of animals, things, atmospheric phenomena….Or rather, they do not believe in [croire à] it: this existence is simply a fact of experience: there is no more need to believe in [croire à] the *margaï* than to believe if you throw a stone it will fall. One fears and/or trusts in them, one gets to know them, one gets used to them…[91]

While Dangaleat has words which have been translated as ‘belief’ the language has no one unifying term that can be used to encompass all understandings and

[90] Pouillon, p. 4. [Original emphasis.]
[91] Pouillon, p. 7. [Original emphasis.]

usages.[92] The Hadjeraï have no need for one word partly because their religion is based on what they see, feel and experience in the world around them; if there are spirits then the spirits are just as much a part of the world as the people. Pouillon's conclusion was that the history of Western religion has had a significant influence on the uses of the word believe which are found in French (and other European languages). The interdependence of language and religion is particularly relevant where the concept of Western 'belief' is applied to other cultures and situations.

The originating culture (Western) includes more possible actions in one expression (in this case the word belief) than does the destination culture (Hadjeraï). Of course the Hadjeraï have other phrases which encompass related ideas, but all the ideas related to belief are not held in one word. The Hadjeraï also have a different kind of deity – not the personal mono-theistic God of Christianity. When such a term is applied to the destination culture which is not mono-theistic the differences between the two cultures are hidden by the carry-over of the term. If this is not clearly explained the risk is that the idea that 'the Hadjeraï believe in spirits' will be seen as consonant with the Christian idea of believing in God. To serve one God with whom believers have a personal relationship is quite different than to serve a series of spirits who are unpredictable. The implications of transposing 'belief' which relates to "a being whose existence must also be affirmed" onto 'belief' which relates to spirits who do not require affirmation, are clearly of a different order.

As Pouillon explaines, to even use the term 'Dangaleat religion' is problematic if it is being compared to Western understandings because:

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[92] Pouillon, p. 5.

> it is not in the sense in which the faithful share a single elaborated body of beliefs about supernatural beings, but rather in the etymological sense…that of a meticulous concern for the carrying out of the cult, without, however, being able to define the necessary correctives in advance; at every occasion, one takes aim with uncertainty.[93]

Another verb in Dangaleat signifies "to bestow one's trust on," "to rest on," "to believe in" and is also used beyond religious contexts.[94] There are two other verbs which translate "to believe that," which in Dangaleat also mean "to find out, to know, to know about something" and "think, suppose, figure out, foresee"[95] These translations reflect the anthropologist and not the Dangaleat's understandings. This way of relating to other cultures assumes that there is an equivalent, but Pouillon's point is that there is none. The differences tell us important information about our own tradition.

The Hadjeraï 'experience' the spirits; they do not need to believe in them because they simply exist and therefore there is also no need for doubt. The spirits are part of the known world, local environment and everyday experiences. In contrast to the Christian view where language use suggests that knowing or experiencing God involves having access to another world – a different reality, a place where life continues after death – it makes sense that Dangaleat does not have a single term to represent belief.

Ruel's work addresses the word belief as its meanings have been affected by Christian culture and usage in relation to anthropological studies. Meanwhile, Pouillon delves deeper into linguistic philosophy to demonstrate that the linguistic use of belief in the West is a product of the demands of a specific religion on a specific culture and that this does not translate or transpose well.

The philosophy at the beginning of this chapter gave us to understand that

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[93] Pouillon, p. 7.
[94] Pouillon, p. 5.
[95] Pouillon, p. 5.

belief is both structured and influenced by Christianity and Greek philosophy. The legacy of metaphysics holds the discussion of belief hostage to the ever spiraling closure of representation. Binary structures must be deconstructed in order to access some of the physical and material aspects of Christian performance. In this way action can be understood as relevant to the overall performance of belief. The preconceived linguistic ideas of anthropologists are a good example of both the causes and the results of the cultural biases. As such, belief can be understood as linguistically and culturally encoded. Any one version of belief only makes sense as part of the larger web of concepts. These layers of argument lay the foundation for the following theories which explain the functioning of speech act theory and the explicit performative.

## THE PERFORMATIVE BELIEF ACT

Performative is a term that comes out of linguistic theory, but it is also used extensively in philosophy and performance studies. "Philosophers rarely think about acting in the theatrical sense." So begins Judith Butler's 1988 essay on 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.'[96] Philosophy may not be directly interested in acting, but it does investigate 'acts,' e.g. 'action theory' in moral philosophy, the theory of 'acts' in phenomenology and 'speech acts' in linguistic theory.[97] As a noun performative "indicates a word or sentence that does something," and it is in this context that is most often used in linguistic theory.[98]

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[96] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1998), 519-531 (p. 519).

[97] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 519. "Further, 'action theory,' a domain of moral philosophy, seeks to understand what it is 'to do' prior to any claim of what one *ought* to do. Finally, the phenomenological theory of 'acts,' espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead, among others, seeks to explain the mundane way in which social agents *constitute* social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign."

[98] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 110.

The adjective form is used across disciplines and "inflects what it modifies with performance-like qualities."[99]

When J.L Austin first defined speech acts in 1955 he proposed the idea that verbs are not just descriptive or constative but can be used to 'do' things.[100] Speech contains actions, which are not reliant on physical action for their expression. Within speech acts he identifies a sub-category of words that are themselves actions; these have come to be known as performatives. Instead of just describing, in these cases the verb performs the act. Examples include promising and ordering, for example, 'I promise to keep your secret,' or, 'I order you to leave the room.' In each case the person speaking has accomplished the action of the word *in* the speaking of it. There is no accompanying physical action necessary for the action within the word to take place. If a physical action is required it is not a performative.

While this initial distinction aimed to isolate the performative in its own category, the end result of Austin's work is a general theory of speech acts in which 'performative' becomes a way to explain verbs as well as entire utterances, thus, 'I command you to bow' is a performative sentence. While there are many people who work in speech acts from the linguistic point of view, John R. Searle has provided the most extensive expansion of Austin's work in relation to explicit performatives. Explicit performatives were, for Austin, verbs uttered in the first person, present tense, indicative or active form, e.g. 'I accept your invitation.'

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[99] Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 110.

[100] J.L. Austin, *How to do Thing With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 8: "The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act […] the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the *sole* thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or event acts of uttering further words."

Other speech acts could also be called performatives or implicit performatives, but these did not require the verb to name the act, e.g. 'Please pass the salt' which is implicitly a request, i.e. 'I request that you please pass the salt.' This idea of the implicit performative has been mostly abandoned by those who have continued to work with the theory of performativity. Searle has gone so far as to assert that only explicit performatives constitute performative action; "some illocutionary acts can be performed by uttering a sentence containing an expression that names the type of speech act, as in, for example, 'I order you to leave the room.' These utterances, and only these, are correctly described as performative utterances."[101]

In Searle's evaluation there are five categories of performative statements.

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|---|---|
| Assertives | The speaker commits himself in varying degrees to the truth of the expressed proposition. Ex. statements, explanations, assertions |
| Directives | The speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something. Ex. orders, requests, commands |
| Commissives | The speaker commits himself to doing something, to some future course of action. Ex. promising, vows, threats, pledges, contracts, guarantees |
| Expressives | The speaker expresses his feelings and attitudes about some state of affairs specified by the propositional content. Ex. apologies, thanks, congratulations |
| Declarations | The speaker brings about changes in the world through his utterances, so the world changes to match the propositional content, solely in the virtue of the successful performance of the utterance. Ex. declaring war, adjourning a meeting.[102] |

In his essay 'How Performatives Work' Searle states that all performative

[101] John R. Searle, 'How Performatives Work' in *Consciousness and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 156-179 (p. 158). Keir Elam explains the three forms of performative speech in a clear and concise manner: "Austin ultimately decided that a separate category of verbs called performatives was untenable and opted for three sub-categories within speech acts; these are *locutionary* (any basic linguistic act that results in a meaningful utterance); *illocutionary* (the act performed *in* saying something such as asking a question, ordering someone to do something, etc. – it is the 'illocution' which constitutes the speech act proper); and *perlocutionary* (performed *by means of* saying something such as persuading, convincing, etc.). All *perlocutionary acts* are *illocutionary acts*, but this is not reciprocal."(Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 158).

[102] John R. Searle, "Speech Acts, Mind and Social Reality", in *Speech Acts, Mind and Social Reality*, Günther Grewendorf and Georg Meggle, eds. (London: Kluwer, 2002), pp. 3-16 (p. 5).

sentences are declarations. The declaration, according to Searle, is special because its "point is to create a new fact corresponding to the propositional content. Sometimes those new facts are themselves speech acts such as promises, statements, orders, etcetera."[103] So the declaration produces a new state which would not have otherwise existed and is only possible through language. It is because Searle took performatives to be literal that this is possible.[104] The utterance "I promise to keep your secret" is thus literally a promise in the moment it is made. It brings about a new state because the speaker has committed himself to future action.

The use of the verb 'to believe' fits in the categories of assertives, expressives, and declarations. As an assertion it commits the speaker to the existence of a belief, e.g. 'I believe that people are inherently good'; as an expressive it refers to the speaker's dedication to the propositional content of the belief, e.g. 'I believe what you told me'; and as a declaration it refers to the belief declared, e.g. 'I believe in God.' From these three sentences it is clear that belief is expressed in different ways depending on the context and object (or subject) of belief.

This was a quick and brief introduction to a substantial field in linguistics. The ideas generated by Austin, Searle and others have proven useful to a large number of other fields.[105] In particular critical theory where the work of Judith

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[103] Searle, 'How Performatives Work', p. 170.

[104] There are many discussions around this topic into the nature of intention, truth conditions and linguistic conventions which are interesting but not directly applicable the argument I am following through this dissertation. For more on Searle's understanding of performatives see: Searle, John R., *Speech Acts*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 'Metaphor', in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. by Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 83-111; *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1983]); *Expression and Meaning*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1979]).

[105] The variety of fields that have taken up aspects of theory of performativity in relation to belief is quite diverse. These fields use the term in many ways and do not always sufficiently clarify exactly what is meant. The following is an example from the field of communications from

Butler stands out as the most widely know and used. However, before Butler engaged the performative others were attempting to build theories that explained more than just linguistic utterances.

An early philosophical analysis dealing uniquely with belief as a performative utterance came from Gerald Myers. In 'Justifying Belief-Assertions' he differentiates between the first utterance of 'I believe' and all subsequent utterances of the same. Myers explains that the first utterance is simply a statement whereas all following utterances are performative building on and validating the original and each other:

> The logical status of 'I believe p' differs from that of its reiteration. In any given context, the original utterance of a belief-assertion is an ordinary truth-claim, whereas its sincere reiteration is a performative utterance; it is a linguistic performance serving as the most accessible, as well as the most commonly resorted to, behavioral test for the truth of the original utterance. We need not deny to the reiteration the status of a truth-claim; that is, the sincere reiteration of 'I believe p' repeats at least the same truth-claim as the original utterance. The point is that the reiteration is not merely a repetition; it is, besides, a linguistic performance ordinarily countable as evidence for 'I believe p'.[106]

According to this argumentation belief becomes stronger and more serious with

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Bernardina De Carolis' article 'APML, a Markup Language for Believable Behavior Generation': "Therefore, the minimal unit of communication is a communicative act that is made up of two parts, two packages of beliefs: a performative and a propositional content. Any time we communicate we must have conceived of at least these two packages of beliefs, and to the extent to which these beliefs are beliefs we have the goal to communicate to an Addressee, we can say they form a meaning. A meaning can be viewed, then as a set of beliefs that a system has the goal to transmit to another system: that is, belief S has the goal that also A believes." Bernardina de Carolis and others, 'APML, a Markup Language for Believable Behavior Generation' in *Life-Like Characters: Tools, Affective Functions, and Applications*, ed. by Helmut Prendinger and Mitsuru Ishizuka, (Berlin: Springer, 2004), pp. 65-86 (p. 68). Here belief is connected to performative and propositional content in communication. It is said to form the foundation for all meaning. Each piece of information communicated is given the status of a belief. This is clearly untenable in relation to performance studies, as much of what is communicated can simply not be accorded the status of belief. Nor can every statement be reliant on belief or the entire concept of belief as different from knowledge is undermined. And a final example from the field of medicine: Ted Kaptchuk argues that healing rituals in alternative medicine have "performative efficacy" that "relies on the power of belief, imagination, symbols, meaning, expectation, persuasion, and self-relationship (Ted Kaptchuk, 'The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine: Can the Performance of a Healing Ritual Have Clinical Significance?', *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2002:136, 4), 817-818.

[106] Gerald E. Myers, 'Justifying Belief-Assertions', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64.7 (1967), 210-214.

each repetition of the action, with each performance. The reiteration confirms the previous statements and affords the current statement relevance. If ‘I believe p’ is part of a frequently performed ritual it therefore comes to have more power and credibility over time. The combined assertions of all those present for each enactment coupled with weekly, monthly or yearly repetitions confirms the utterance’s performative power. As part of a ritual the utterance of belief is automatically taken seriously, at least within the ritual itself.[107] Myers mentions ‘truth-claims’ but in this case the use of ‘truth’ is not meant to relegate the utterance to the binary of ‘true’ or ‘false’. Rather truth conditions are bound up with the performance of a successful declaration and this relies on the proper context and intent.[108]

Thirty years after Myers was writing Judith Butler took up the same problem, although more generally, i.e. not specifically in relation to belief. Her account agrees with Myers in relation to the power of repetition, moreover she states that performative action is completely reliant on this structure for its effectiveness:

> If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that “success” is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*. It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is

[107] Many factors need to be taken into account in order for the statement to be taken seriously. In the utterance ‘I believe p’ p has to be possible, reasonable and not an ‘I know p’ statement, for example, ‘I believe that Florence is the capital of Italy’ should really be expressed as ‘I know’ because it is knowledge based. It can be proven through empirical data. It is therefore not ‘possible’ nor ‘reasonable’ as a statement. Examples which would work for p include ‘in God,’ ‘that people are inherently good,’ ‘that she loves me,’ etc.

[108] Other philosophers have argued two additional ways to analyze performative sentences. The first casts the performative verb as the illocutionary force and equates this with any other linguistic device. In this case there are *no* truth conditions associated with the performative. The second possibility holds that all performative sentences are statements. In order to promise, the speaker makes a statement to the effect that he promises. In this case there *are* truth conditions that must be met by the speaker. See John R. Searle and Daniel Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 1.

> itself a ritualized practice. What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that it *draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force.[109]

Whatever the situation in which the speech act is repeated, it draws its power both from the practice of which it is a part and from its own power as a repeatable and repeated act. Butler also usefully introduces the word 'succeeds' instead of the former 'truth-claims' into her evaluation of performative action. Success is more easily analysed in a relative manner, e.g. more or less successful instead of 'true' or 'false.'[110] In response to the question of how belief might be analysed as part of a performance, the performative 'I believe' can be analysed as any other speech act. It gains power and authority as with any other action that is performative.

Another way to understand this functioning of the performative is to think of it as self-referential. Searle explains that performatives are "self-referential in a special way, they are not only *about* themselves, but they also operate on themselves. They are both *self-referential* and *executive*."[111] By self-referential Searle means that the verb refers to itself, to its own action and not to an ideal of the named action, or to the existence of such an action elsewhere – it names its act in the moment of execution. The execution of the action named by the verb is also carried out in the moment of speaking, and this is how the performative, as Searle put it, operates on itself, i.e. is executive. Thus, to return to Butler, each utterance of the performative contains its own new action and execution, while it echoes previous utterances. This echoing is not the same as mimicking or copying

[109] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 51. [Original emphasis.]
[110] There is of course the binary of success and failure, but Butler introduces the idea of success as provisional and not, therefore, as an absolute.
[111] Searle, 'How Performatives Work', p. 172.

as each utterance needs to refer to itself in order to function, but the repetition over time shows that the utterance does indeed do what it says it will. Some performatives do commit the speaker to action in the future, e.g. 'I promise to come to the party' commits the speaker to attend a party in the future, but the promise itself is present tense and bound to the moment it is uttered. Performative action is created in the moment by those present.

Judith Butler took the study of speech acts and applied the theories developed by Austin and others to the broader concept of gender in her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1997). Her ideas have subsequently been employed by many performance scholars to bridge the gap between the embodied and discursive sides of performance analysis.[112] In her essay 'Melancholy Gender-Refused Identification' Butler explains how gender could be looked at in terms of the idea of performativity:

> I argued that gender was performative, and by that I meant that there is no gender that is "expressed" by actions, gestures, or speech, but that the performance of gender was precisely that which produced retroactively the illusion that there was an inner gender core. Indeed, the performance of gender might be said retroactively to produce the effect of some true or abiding feminine essence or disposition, such that one could not use an expressive model for thinking about gender. Moreover, I argued that gender is produced as a ritualized repetition of conventions and that this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality.[113]

In this explanation performative action is effected through a complex combination of physical actions that together relay information about the person doing the actions. It is through observing the entire person that a picture of their

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[112] Examples include: 'Re: Blau, Butler, Beckett, and the Politics of Seeming', by Elin Diamond, *TDR: The Drama Review***,** 44 (2000), 31-43; Josette Féral, 'The Dramatic Art of Robert Lepage: Fragments of Identity', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 19 (2009), 143-154; the collection of essays in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998)

[113] Judith Butler, 'Melancholy Gender-Refused Identification,' in *Gender in Psychoanalytic Space: Between Clinic and Culture*, ed. by Muriel Dimin and Virgina Goldner (New York: Other Press, 2002), pp. 3-20 (p. 13).

gender appears, thus the concept of retroactive production, i.e. only after watching a person for a period of time is it possible to say how that person performs their gender role. This knowledge is then applied back onto previous encounters and interactions. While the ritualized repetition of conventions is shared by all members in society in relation to many behaviours, it is the implicit coercion of compulsory heterosexuality that is key to how Butler's argument works. By bringing this development of the concept of performativity into relation with psychoanalytic understandings of the function of repression, Butler traces a set of logical steps that involve the role of law in legislating behaviour. This in turn affects how she articulates agency. I briefly sketch out Butler's theories before explaining how my use of the performative differs in relation to belief.

In *Gender Trouble* Butler first developed the theory that gender is performative. As she writes, this view "sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body."[114] Therefore gender is not fixed because it is created through repeated actions. Of primary concern to her argument was the interplay between an internal essence and an external appearance of gender. One of the ways she explained this idea was through a corollary: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very **"**expressions**"** that are said to be its results."[115] This is the same way that Austin and Searle's Speech Acts function: the performance of gender happens in the moment of its performance.[116]

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[114] Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), p. xv.
[115] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.
[116] She discusses "gender as an enactment that performatively constitutes the appearance of its own interior fixity." Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 89.

A significant focus of both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* is to show how society regulates human actions. Butler argues that gender would not exist if there were not a collective agreement to perform and maintain the cultural fiction of gender. She asks questions framed by the language of power and resistance: "If gender is constructed through relations of power and…normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint?"[117] Her aim is to interrogate agency in situations where the performance of gender constrained. In the quotation below Butler's logical moves are clearly articulated from a general understanding to the enforced regulation of gender:

> Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress.[118]

This quotation traces a sequence of thought from an explanation of the construction of gender through to the punishment if the roles are not played adequately.[119]

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[117] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. x.
[118] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 178.
[119] I am aware that Butler furthers and defends criticisms of her theory of performativity from *Gender Trouble* in her later book *Bodies that Matter*. The conception of performativity as articulated by *Butler in Bodies that Matter* takes it even more into the realm of the punitive. At the end of that book she reasserts her position on performativity that is focused on power relations:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources

This idea of punitive consequences is important to the understanding of agency that Butler is forwarding because, as Saba Mahmood has argued, "Butler tends to develop the concept of agency primarily in the context of supporting resistance against social norms (e.g. her reading of drag's significance)."[120] It is her interest in resistance to social norms that leads Butler to a discussion of psychoanalysis and the law. She uses the perspective of psychoanalysis to present 'deviant' sexualities as the 'repressed' that must be controlled through specific circumstances, which are enabled and helped by the law.[121] The law protects that which it can identify and ironically, "[t]he notion of an "original" sexuality forever repressed and forbidden thus becomes a production of the law which subsequently functions as its prohibition."[122] Many expressions of gender are therefore punishable, or at least monitored and maintained, by the law and Butler's theory explains how these laws are upheld by social norms. It is in relation to social norms that Butler's project differs most significantly from other uses of the performative.

Recent publications on Butler's work, specifically the edited collection *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, develop the application of the performative to religious practices. Saba Mahmood's article, 'Agency, Performativity and the Feminist Subject,' focuses on female Muslim communities

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inevitably impure (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 241).
The argument in this dissertation does not rely on the same notion of agency. The focus on the religious sphere necessitates a different agency for performativity. I am interested instead in how the performative works autonomously in situations of self-production of action as articulated by Saba Mahmood in 'Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject', in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 177-221. I introduce Mahmood's work in the next paragraph.

[120] Saba Mahmood paraphrased by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, in 'Introduction,' in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. xiii-xxi (p. xviii).

[121] "[O]ne needs to read the drama of the Symbolic, of desire, of the institution of sexual difference as a self-supporting signifying economy that wields power in the marking off of what can and cannot be thought within the terms of cultural intelligibility." Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 99-100.

[122] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 97.

and shifts the notion of agency away from a position of defence:

> I want to suggest we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create. This relatively open-ended understanding of agency draws upon poststructuralist theories of subject formation and is indebted to Judith Butler's work. However, as will become clear, my analysis of agency departs from Butler's argument in that I want to explore those modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic norms.[123]

Mahmood rethinks Butler's discussion of agency because the treatment of the subject in Butler is framed by the need to resist forces that repress expression. As Mahmood explains, Butler "claims that the iterable and repetitive character of the performatives makes the structure of norms vulnerable and unstable because the reiteration my fail."[124]

The subject in Mahmood's research is not constructed in the same way, i.e. is not identified foremost with an outside adversary.[125] Butler shows how a complex set of systems has controlled social understandings of gender, and made the performance of actions part of a larger resistance. Mahmood makes the case for instances where the understandings of performative actions are of a completely different nature. She defines agency in relation to historical and cultural specificities and writes that we "must detach the concept of agency from the trope of resistance so as to be able to explore other structures of desire, political imaginaries, social authority, and personhood."[126] In this way agency is presented as part of behaviours that are not immediately concerned with overturning or resisting forms of control or oppression.

Mahmood's conception of agency detaches it from a specifically resistant

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[123] Mahmood, p. 180.
[124] Mahmood, p. 200.
[125] "Given Butler's theory of the subject, it is not surprising that her analysis of performativity also informs her conceptualization of agency; indeed, as she says, "the iterability of performativity is a theory of agency"" (Mahmood, p. 189).
[126] Mahmood, p. 180.

conception of politics, and allows it a degree of autonomy in self-production, i.e, it accommodates the possibility that agency may be exercised on its own behalf rather than in response to pre-existing forms of suppression. This distances her work from other theories of agency and Mahmood has a good reason for doing so: "In order to grasp these modes of action indebted to other reasons and histories, I want to argue that it is crucial to detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics."[127] Specifically, she makes the case that this is necessary in order to properly "attend to the specific logic of the discourse of piety: a logic that inheres not in the intentionality of the actors but in the relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices that constitute a particular discursive tradition."[128] Mahmood's research is on religious communities and I endorse this approach for examinations of religious and secular rituals. It allows for participants to have agency "in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms."[129] Rituals are normalized cultural behaviours and, while some are, not every ritual is about breaking through cultural barriers. The performance of actions in the religious or spiritual environments that I detail in the case studies in this thesis are part of an examination of the "multiple ways in which one inhabits norms." Belief cannot be 'expressed' by actions, gestures, or speech alone but is performed through "the relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices that constitute a particular discursive tradition."[130] Western models of belief have been codified through repetition in language and behaviour as has gender, but belief is not socially compelled in the same way. The norms that exist in the performance of the Christian tradition are

[127] Mahmood, p. 186.
[128] Mahmood, p. 180.
[129] Mahmood, p. 186.
[130] Mahmood, p. 180.

‘inhabited’ with agency and not ‘prisoner’ to the form, as I will show in the case study that follows.

To return to the question of how belief can be analysed as part of a performance where the speech acts themselves are not part of the analysis, Butler’s and Mahmood’s work both point towards a combination of philosophical and anthropological methods. Butler links the individual act of gender with all social acts of gender, claiming that these are never completed in isolation, both because they are learned behaviours which exist before the individual learns them, and because they can only exist if people continue to perform them.[131] In relation to belief this is once again a helpful way to engage with an analysis – the accepted ways of expressing belief already exist in Western culture.

Mahmood presents anthropology as a field that has long advocated an understanding of cultural actions as part of but not limited to “discursive traditions”:

> My argument should be familiar to anthropologists who have long acknowledged that the terms people use to organize their lives are not simply a gloss for universally shared assumptions about the world and one’s place in it but are actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge, and experience.”[132]

For the participant, the combined experiences in the ritual form the totality of the understanding carried from enactment to enactment. This links back to Asad, Ruel and Pouillon’s arguments about needing to incorporate more robust analyses of religion that take into account unacknowledged cultural biases about belief; that belief informs and indeed *is* action; that belief is not only an interior state; and that understanding belief is more complex than simply identifying the object of belief.

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[131] Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’, pp. 525-6.
[132] Mahmood, p. 180.

As with the way rituals function – with each iteration building on those that have come before and prefacing those that are to come – the approaches to the theory of performativity have built an argument for the relevance of performative theory to the study of rituals throughout this introductory chapter. Plato, Nietzsche and Derrida have pointed out the frameworks which shape how we conceive of metaphysical structures and how dependent our philosophy is on the continuance of such structures. Ruel and Pouillon have shown how the linguistic expression of belief is obviously learned through language acquisition. The physical actions and gestures of belief need to be examined in contexts where belief is performed.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated belief through philosophy and theology to highlight metaphysical assumptions and structures. The relevance of language to understanding Western belief and embodied practice has been discussed with examples from anthropological case studies. Vocabulary and syntax are mutually dependent and culturally specific and thus of great importance to descriptions and analyses of performances. While Western religious ritual has been primarily examined through semiotic and representational analyses, the rituals themselves have been shown here to be embodied and performative. To do justice to such rituals, and the performance of belief they entail, another approach to analysis should be included in current research methodologies. In Chapter 2 a literature analysis and introduction to methodologies is provided.

# CHAPTER 2
# INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES OF BELIEF

The research focus of this dissertation was articulated in the previous chapter as interdisciplinary. To address the need for a literature review and some background to the methodological needs of performance research this chapter functions as the literature review. And as the dissertation is interdisciplinary, so is the review. Three sections are used to review both literature and methodologies. The first section is a literature review of theology as it has engaged with analyses of the performance of the liturgy. This section explains that the overarching approach in theology has been a normative one which seeks to establish meaning for liturgical action and to stipulate what constitutes a successful performance by reference to external criteria, the text, or norms. A typical analysis might take an historical point of view which contextualises contemporary enactments of the liturgy in light of historical tradition, patterns, and precedents. This kind of analysis is useful for its rigour in establishing historical continuity or discontinuity, but does not address the performative aspect of the liturgy.

The second section is a review of methodologies used by anthropology to analyse ritual. Recent research in anthropology has shown that despite claims of being a secular science, anthropology is more indebted to, and indeed embedded in, its Christian past than has previously been acknowledged. In light of this methodologies themselves are being questioned. The third section focuses on audience reception theories from three perspectives – philosophy, theatre studies and performance studies – to show the importance of the conception of the entire event to any analysis of a performance. Together these three reviews provide examples from the most prominent disciplinary contributions to this dissertation.

Before introducing the literature and methodologies that impact how liturgy and performance are understood, I offer an explanation and description of the Roman Catholic liturgy.

## LITURGICAL FORM

Liturgy is a type of ritual, but not all rituals are liturgies. Simply explained, liturgy is as specific as organised public religious worship following a prescribed form, and as general as a set of repeatable (and often repeated) actions, texts, ceremonies or performances. It is comprised of sections which, in the Christian tradition, focus on the celebration of the Eucharist (the ceremony of blessing the bread and wine and then the communal sharing of the meal which, depending on the denomination, either represent or transubstantiate into the body and blood of Jesus Christ).[1] This one central ritual is surrounded by smaller distinct rituals such as prayers, responses, readings and songs which collectively make up the text of the liturgy. Within this framework, individual rituals can change or evolve, i.e. the words of the liturgy can change to suit the time of year or a particular focus of the congregation; or the style of music can change from tuning forks, to pipe organ, to pop music.[2] Throughout, the integrity of the liturgy as a whole is maintained. Larger changes can be incorporated such as the addition of other elements for Easter or Christmas celebrations and the liturgy itself remains intact.

[1]For Roman Catholics, strictly speaking, without the Eucharist there is no liturgy. Services of prayer can take place without there being a liturgy. The theology behind what happens to the bread and wine has evolved and changed over the centuries and even within one denomination each person may believe something slightly different about what happens when the objects are blessed by the person (priest, vicar, pastor, leader) leading the service.

[2] If the words of the liturgy are adapted, it is important to note that the central story of the Eucharist does not change. The retelling of what happened when Jesus first used bread and wine as symbols of the crucified body cannot and is not significantly changed, even across denominations.

Every Roman Catholic congregation develops its own way of worshiping while maintaining the central content of the liturgy which is Eucharistic celebration.

The definition of the word liturgy comes from the Greek word *liturgia* which meant the "the work of the people."[3] As Patricia Wilson-Kastner writes,

> Originally in Greek the phrase did not mean "a work done by lots of people," but some work undertaken for the community's good (a public philanthropy). Building a bridge, doing military service, or putting on a public play was "liturgy." The Septuagint translators used "liturgy" to describe the Temple worship. In the New Testament, "liturgy" identified Temple worship, but also received a uniquely Christian meaning—Jesus' life and obedient death for us, and his risen life for our redemption (see Heb 8:6). Thus the Christian life lived in the spirit of Jesus is also a liturgy (see Phil. 2.30).[4]

What Wilson-Kastner identifies in this explanation of liturgy is the application by the Greeks of the word liturgy to the Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Before the Septuagint[5] and the advent of Christianity, liturgy brought to mind many types of work, but after these developments, liturgy was also associated with a specific type of spiritual 'work'; a fully embodied (body, soul and mind) work. In her explanation 'work' is linked specifically with the body of Jesus, what he did in life and how he used his body in death and resurrection. She also links this notion of 'work' to all those 'believers' who follow the Christian religion. Thus the idea of liturgical work is associated specifically with a religious group whose identity, as I have shown in Chapter 1, is bound up with 'belief' as a concept, a linguistic manifestation, and an embodied practice. This understanding of liturgy as 'work' includes a huge variety of possible actions: physical (physical actions and speech actions), material (interaction with objects), mental and spiritual. This description of liturgy is clearly relevant to the discussion in the last chapter about

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[3] Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Sacred Drama: A Spirituality of Christian Liturgy* (Mineapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 7.
[4] Wilson-Kastner, p. 7.
[5] The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It was translated between 300 and 200 BCE (Before the Common Era instead of BC).

the ways in which belief can be performed. The performance of the Christian liturgy is one way in which beliefs are performed through the entire person and it has been the dominant religious form of embodied action in the West for close to two thousand years.

To explain what happens in the liturgy, the following descriptions are meant to clarify basic aspects of the service, not to be an exhaustive explanation of all that is happening.[6] The liturgy itself is structured in such as way as to involve and draw in the participant. Research in this area has been done by many theologians, establishing the meaning and reason for each element. The entire Roman Catholic liturgy is conventionally broken into five sections: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Communion Rite, and Concluding Rite (for a detailed description of each section see Appendix A).

This structure may seem to be static, but the liturgy has changed significantly since the first time Jesus blessed the bread and wine, and the twentieth century brought in huge changes through liturgical reform. The origins of the Christian liturgy are in the first century CE.[7] The liturgy has changed and evolved in each century, but it was not until the time of the Council of Trent in 1563 that large scale, organised, liturgical reform was undertaken. Changes effected at this point set four hundred years of liturgical performance in motion, during which the liturgy continued to adapt to each generation. The next major reform was undertaken at the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1963. Vatican II paid special and specific attention to the liturgy and its role in the

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[6] For more on the structure of the liturgy see Denis Crouan, S.T.D., *The History and the Future of the Roman Liturgy*, trans. by Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005); Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (Farnborough: St. Michael's Abbey Press, 2004).
[7] CE refers to the Common Era instead of using AD.

church. According to Annibale Bugnini who was “*the* key figure in liturgical reform [from 1949] until 1975”[8]:

> The reform that the Second Vatican Council inaugurated is differentiated from all others in the history of the Liturgy by its pastoral emphasis. The participation and active involvement of the people of God in the liturgical celebration is the ultimate goal of the reform.[9]

The desire for active participation is key to understanding the performance of the liturgy because Vatican II recast the congregation as performative participants who effect the ‘work’ of the liturgy – completing the action of the liturgy by participating.

The official stance of the church is that the liturgy is worship and action.[10] Whether explicitly or implicitly, Vatican II clearly placed value on the use of embodied practices in Christian worship. The liturgy has been examined as a devotional text, a sacred text, a literary text, and in relation to many aspects of church history such as church architecture, politics, morals, policies of control and indoctrination.[11] All of these aspects are of scholarly interest, but do not address, except perhaps in passing, the importance of the performative dimension. Most analyses are textual and they fall roughly into three categories – theological, historical, and anthropological. There is, of course, overlap between these areas and other categories could be added if a closer differentiation was necessary. To

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[8] Reid, p. 137. [Original emphasis.]
[9] Bugnini in Reid, p. 291.
[10] The documents of Vatican II describe the function of the liturgy in many ways but all return to the use of the body through actions undertaken as a group: “In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.” Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican Council, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html> [accessed 16 April 2009] Chapter 1 Section 7.
[11] For a helpful book on the interaction of church architecture and the Roman Catholic liturgy see Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture* in *Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998). For more on liturgy and Christian morality see, Hamon L. Smith, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Liturgy and the Moral Life* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995).

these analyses I add contemporary research, in a section on performance approaches, that is bringing attention to the idea of the performative as relevant to liturgical theology.

## TEXTUAL LITURGY

Across fields the main mode of analysis of the liturgy has been textual. As the liturgy exists as a text, this is to be expected. However, when the liturgy is performed, the text is a guide to the performance which exists alongside the embodied form. The tendency has been to analyse the performance of an observed liturgical event on how well it represents the text, and thus, the text becomes the standard against which all performances are measured. Without analyses that address the difference between the performed and written text only a partial understanding of the physical actions can ever be achieved. An examination of performance can still refer to the text for the structure or clarity it provides the embodied work. Approaches such as theology, history and anthropology, all suffer from the same tendency to rely on, or revert to, the text.

### Theology

The theology behind the liturgy is a topic which has occupied all denominations of the Christian church for the last two thousand years as evidenced by the plethora of books devoted to the subject.[12] The field of liturgical theology concerns itself specifically with the liturgy and looks at the meanings – symbolic,

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[12] A thorough and very useful series on the Roman Catholic Liturgy can be found in the *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Introduction to the Liturgy*, Vol. I (1997); *Fundamental Liturgy*, Vol. II (1998); *The Eucharist*, Vol. III (1999); *Sacraments and Sacramentals*, Vol. IV (1999); *Liturgical Time and Space*, Vol. V (2000), Anscar J. Chupungco, ed., (Collegeville: Liturgical Press). The classic text on the Anglican liturgy already mentioned is: Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983 [1945]).

semiotic, and literal – and interpretations, relationship to scripture, and of course, theological implications of the liturgy.[13] Theology as a field is understandably focussed on the spiritual aspects and implications of liturgy and has traditionally analysed the theological through the text. Theological questions, issues and concerns can be discussed and interpreted through the text of the liturgy itself with reference to the importance of the liturgical event, without requiring the reference of a specific performance moment. An example of a thorough and accessible work on liturgical theology is the five volume *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, edited by Anscar J. Chupungco. It is a series of essays which systematically examine all aspects of the liturgy. The titles of the five volumes give an indication of the way information is organised - *Introduction to the Liturgy*, *Fundamental Liturgy*, *The Eucharist*, *Sacraments and Sacramentals*, and *Liturgical Time and Space*. Many parts of these volumes could be useful analysing performative action and some even point towards performative possibilities.[14] Occasional references throughout the volumes to performance practices indicate an interest in the variety of ways people express themselves in relation to spirituality. In the opening section of *Introduction to the Liturgy* Chupungco links various forms of spiritual expression with the liturgy: "Today we speak more broadly of popular religiosity which includes also such acts as

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[13] The role of liturgists and theologians in the shaping of methods, meanings and the liturgical renewal of the contemporary church are explored in: K.W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994). The wider implications of semiotics on meaning and understanding of the liturgy is covered in: Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a helpful look on all aspects of how language functions in theology and liturgy see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002); and *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998). Also see Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*, revised by Bernard Botte, O.S.B., trans. by F.L. Cross, (London: Mowbray, 1958); and Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller, *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Paternoster Press, 2001).

[14] A specific reference to "the performative and the prayer" is found in 'Theology of the Eucharistic Celebration', by David N. Power, in Chupungco, *Vol III*, pp. 321-366 (p. 355). This is quite a short section and does not delve into an examination of performative action.

pilgrimages, religious drama and dance, and processions. Several of these forms of religiosity have their roots in the liturgy."[15] Drama and dance are mentioned, yet they are contextualised in relation to the liturgy itself, and not given further examination in relation to performance theories. The focus of liturgical theology is the liturgy itself and how it manifests in various forms, not on the performative elements of its performance.[16]

Another way that theology engages with performance practices is through metaphor. The usefulness of drama, theatre and performance as means to explain the complex relationships of God to people have been well utilised by theology.[17] God can be thought of as the director, the playwright, and/or an actor depending on the point of view. Two examples of this style of writing in theology are worth noting here. Hans Urs von Balthasar's three volume *Theo-Drama* is, as Trevor A. Hart has explained, the "most sustained and programmatic treatment of an *analogia dramatis* in theology."[18] Von Balthasar introduces his project as a way to "use the categories of drama to illuminate Christian theology."[19] However, he never intends this usage to exceed its capacity as a tool for better theological understandings:

> Thus it is already clear that, while the conceptual categories of secular drama provide us with a preliminary understanding, they cannot offer anything like a complete grasp. They remain at the level of image and

[15] Chupungco, Vol I, p. 9.
[16] Graham Hughes organises his book on liturgical theology and meaning around the question: "is it possible to give some account of the ways in which the meanings of worship are organized and transmitted by those who lead and are appropriated by those who participate in a worship service?" Hughes, p. 11.
[17] Trevor A. Hart discusses many aspects of this in the introduction to *Faithful Performances*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1-9.
[18] Hart, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[19] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama I: Prolegomena*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 25.

> metaphor, as is clear from their ultimate ambiguity; here too, the greater dissimilarity in the analogy prevents us from using any terms univocally.[20]

What von Balthasar has identified is that the use of drama simply as a metaphor is limited. It might be productive in relation to some structures and aspects of theology but it is ultimately only a partial way into the subject.

Another use of drama as metaphor is found in the recent publications of Kevin J. Vanhoozer.[21] His book *The Drama of Doctrine* uses the metaphor of drama as a way to inform Biblical interpretation.[22] Vanhoozer positions the actions of the church as performative actions which have far reaching consequences: "The church does not have to stage revolutionary performances; it *is* revolutionary theatre. For everything the church says and does in its liturgy and its corporate life continues the theo-drama."[23] This use of the words performance, theatre and drama is descriptive and does not differentiate between the modes of representation involved in each. While Vanhoozer asserts that the church "*is* revolutionary theatre," which seems to claim performative force for the actions of

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[20] von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama I: Prolegomena*, p. 18. Von Balthasar developed his theories in response to a problem in theology, namely that 'rationalist abstraction' had derailed 'methodological clarity:' "The shortcomings of the theology that has come down to us through the centuries has called forth new approaches and methods in recent decades. Disciples and opponents alike have been quick to narrow down each of these approaches to a slogan, a catch phrase, although originally they were often conceived in broader and deeper terms; and they have one thing in common. They all see theology stuck fast on the sandbank of rationalist abstraction and want to get it moving again. Each of these attempts contains something right, even something indispensable. But none of them is adequate to provide the basis for a Christian theology." (p. 25)

[21] Vanhoozer is an advocate of rethinking and rearticulating the inter-connectedness of theology and philosophy. This echoes some of what I was promoting in the first section of this dissertation in relation to performance studies: "Of late, a number of theologians have enshrined ecclesiology as "first theology," the source and norm alike of faith's search for understanding. Those who draw their theological first principles from ecclesiology have made what we may call the "cultural-linguistic turn." This turn to the church's own habits of speaking and acting is a welcome, and long overdue, change. For much of modernity, theology has been in thrall to principles drawn largely from philosophy, resulting in what we may term a kind of "Athenian" captivity of the church. To begin theologizing from the church's own language and culture is to make a radical break from the modern tendency to start with some neutral methodology." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 6. For more on philosophy and theology see Caputo, John D, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006) and Charlton, William, *Philosophy and Christian Belief* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1988).

[22] Another writer who has used the metaphor of drama extensively is Patricia Wilson-Kastner who was mentioned in the Introduction.

[23] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 428. [Original emphasis.]

the church, the way theatre works (as I have already discussed in the introduction) is through representation.[24] To follow through with the logic, this would mean that the liturgical and corporate life of the church are but representations, and this was clearly not the aim of his use of the word theatre. As we can see, both of these writers ultimately use performance/theatre/drama as useful metaphors to discuss the Bible, theology and liturgy. In this dissertation I am less interested in how spiritual performance might be understood through the metaphor of drama. My concern is to demonstrate the value of performative action in spiritual performances.

In his book *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology*, K.W. Irwin makes the case for analyses of the liturgy using methodologies from other disciplines such as sociology in order to better understand the liturgy as an 'act.'[25] The book is concerned with methodology, and a "principal concern [is] to articulate how the study of liturgy is essentially *pastoral theology* in the sense that it concerns reflection on *enacted* liturgical rites which shape the faith and life of believing participants."[26] This use of 'enacted' is promising as it seems to be used congruently with my use of embodied. Irwin does reflect on enacted liturgy in order to analyse how the meanings are received and understood, but not on how to meaning is created through the use of performative action. He is aware of

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[24] One essay that begins a productive examination of how theology can use theatre theory and in particular takes up Vanhoozer's work is: Joshua Edelman, 'Can an Act be True? The Possibilities of the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology within a Post-Stanislavskian Theatre,' in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 50-72.

[25] Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), p. x.

[26] Irwin, p. xi. [Original emphasis.] The enactment of liturgy is something to which Irwin returns throughout the book: "In addition, this meaning of context seeks to determine the extent to which the setting for liturgy (i.e., assembly, environment) and the conducting of liturgy (i.e., preaching, music, gestures, other means of participation) facilitates and enhances the assembly's appropriation and understanding of the scriptural texts, prayers, symbols and gestures of the liturgy" (Irwin, pp. 54-5).

the limitations of his analysis and lists concepts which he has not been able to include in the book:

> Among the things not sufficiently addressed here are the formulation of a precise method derived from the social sciences for interpreting and evaluating liturgical performance, the role of imagination and affectivity in both liturgical performance and liturgical theology and how to assess the liturgical assembly's engagement in both liturgy and in developing theology derived from it.[27]

In particular, this points to the importance of assessing the liturgical assembly's engagement in relation to performance and practice.[28] His last statement posits the potential for theology to develop further ideas in relation to the experience of enacted liturgy.[29]

**History**

Historical accounts of the liturgy tend to recount in chronological order the changes, adaptations and developments which have taken place over the last two centuries. To the extent that history takes account of every detail of the liturgy, the role of the performance of the liturgy is addressed.[30] However, as with

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[27] Irwin, p. xii. Irwin's approach places the material experiences of liturgical performance on a par with the spiritual aspects. His study examines how the two inform each other continually. While his approach is important and a good attempt to come closer to a holistic view of liturgy it is heavily dependent on textual analysis and even with his emphasis on the context in which the text is performed, he still reverts at every point to the original text from which the actions stem.

[28] "A basic premise for this chapter is that liturgy is fundamentally *orthodoxia prima*, a theological event. In essence, liturgy is an act of *theology*, an act whereby the believing Church addresses God, enters into a dialogue with God, makes statements about its belief in God and symbolizes this belief through a variety of means including creation, words, manufactured objects, ritual gestures and actions." Irwin, p. 44.

[29] Irwin provides a comprehensive introduction to and discussion of the various theologians who have addressed the role of liturgy in the formation of theology and of how theology should approach analyses of liturgy. A common differentiating factor between approaches is whether liturgy has been primarily looked at through text or through action in each successive generation and from each theological position. For a discussion of theological approaches to liturgy from the Reformation and Trent to the early 1990s, see Irwin, pp. 15-32.

[30] As already mentioned, see Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* and *The History and the Future of the Roman Liturgy*, by Denis Crouan.

theology, the focus of the research is not to examine the performance itself and therefore the performative aspects are not analysed even if they are mentioned.[31]

One book which attempts to incorporate the performance of the liturgy into its historical account is James F. White's *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*. In the introduction White sets out how his project is different:

> we shall make an effort to write from the pew, not from the altar. This is easier said than done, since it contradicts the method of most liturgical studies, which are far more concerned about the priest with his chalice than the parishioner with her rosary.[32]

It is in relation to the reforms brought in by Vatican II that White's work offers the most interesting reflections. He quotes extensively from Vatican II documents which state that the aim of liturgical renewal was "full, conscious, and active participation" by the congregation.[33] This desire to integrate all present at the service more directly into the performance of the liturgy found shape in various ways and White uses changes in church architecture as his theme in each section. As the architecture directly influences how bodies can move and circulate in the space this is a useful point of comparison which accommodates considerations of liturgical action from a performance perspective. White discusses the body and participation but the focus of his work is on the history and future of the liturgy from the perspective of the Roman Catholic church and thus, the body takes a secondary role in his account.[34]

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[31] Paul F. Bradshaw's *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2002) covers the first three centuries of Christian Worship as well as reviewing the various scholarly methods and opinions which have existed about liturgical development.
[32] James F White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2003), p. xiv.
[33] White, p. 111. Translations are from Austin Flannery, O.P., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, (Collegeville , Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992).
[34] For a specifically Roman Catholic discussion of the body and liturgy see Louis-Marie Chauvet and Francois Kabasele Lumbala, eds., *Liturgy and the Body-Concilium* (London: SCM, 1995)

Another perspective from which history has engaged with liturgy is through art. The links between art history and Christian theology are many, as Trevor A. Hart explains:

> Engagement between Christian theology and art has a long history. In practical terms, the relationship between Christian faith and artistry stretches back to the earliest decades of Christian history, and the subsequent history of art in the Western tradition is one in which the presence of the Christian church (its beliefs, its practices, its patronage) dominates the horizon for better or worse.[35]

This long history of interaction is well documented[36] and has looked primarily at the production of Christian art for the purposes of illuminating texts or stories, decorating churches or showing the wealth of the church.[37] The dominance of this relationship has produced much research on painting, sculpture and music, but considerably less on drama, theatre and performance. Theology has primarily used the historical research into art as an extension of literary analysis which has led, according to Hart, to artistic practices being "addressed and analysed at the level of their existence as inert 'texts'."[38] Textual analysis of a painting differs from that of embodied practices because the painting is the finished product of a process whereas the liturgy is process and product at the same time.

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[35] Trevor A. Hart, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[36] Many books are dedicated to religious art whether from an art history or anthropological background. For a short and focussed study on pictorial art with specific examples from each century see Beth Williamson's *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). *Objects, Images and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), edited by Colum Hourihane offers a detailed look at the material aspects of liturgical practice which contribute to the overall performance. None of these books addresses the actual performance of the liturgy as an enacted form.

[37] "Works of Christian art were categorized as follows: *didactic* images that taught 'the faith'; *liturgical* objects used for ritual worship; *devotional* visions that nurtured prayer and contemplation; *decorative* entities whose beauty elevated the soul to the spiritual realm; *symbolic* forms that revealed coeval objective and subjective meanings; and works of art that *combined* any or all of the earlier categories." Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Beyond Belief: The Artistic Journey", in *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Immagination*, (Exhibition Catalogue), ed. by Rosemary Crumlin (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998), p. 21. For examples of Christian art see the catalogue of images and articles in Loverance, Rowena, *Christian Art* (London: The British Museum, 2007); and Peter Murray and Linda Murray, *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). A closer examination of the interaction between art and liturgy is found in at the beginning of Chapter 4.

[38] Hart, 'Introduction', p. 2.

**Anthropology**

Anthropological methodologies have been advocated by many who study the liturgy and I want to highlight the work of three people, beginning with the liturgical theologian Mary Margaret Kelleher. While not an anthropologist, she presents her integration of anthropological methodology as a necessary step for the study of liturgy. In the article, 'The Communion Rite: A Study of Roman Catholic Liturgical Performance,' her interest is to identify what happens in the liturgy during Sunday Mass in order to better understand how the performance of liturgy shapes the understandings of future performances. Kelleher uses the anthropological participant-observer method to conduct her research with a congregation over many months. From the beginning of the article she makes it clear that she is aware of the shortcomings of other analyses of liturgy. She states that "[a]lthough much attention has been given to studying the background and texts of new and revised rites, liturgical studies is only in the incipient stages of expanding its sources to include the actual performance of these rites."[39] She wants to present the liturgy as a performance and to examine what happens in the moments she observes with the congregation.

Kelleher develops her own method based on various fields and a key concern is the perception of liturgy as action: "A method designed for the purpose of studying liturgical performance presupposes an understanding of liturgy that takes serious account of the fact that it is a form of action."[40] In other words, she is calling for liturgy to be understood as performative action, as action which accomplishes something in the doing, in the moment. She says that she will focus on the moment of performance and not the analysis of potential action based on a

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[39] Margaret Mary Kelleher, 'The Communion Rite: A Study of Roman Catholic Liturgical Performance', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 2.5 (1991), 99-122 (p. 99).
[40] Kelleher, p. 100.

text. At times she seems to be on the edge of a thorough performative analysis, such as when she asserts that "when assemblies engage in liturgical performance, they are involved in a process of revealing and shaping themselves and therefore the church."[41]

Ultimately, though, her article takes the information she has gathered from her participant-observer status and relates it to the meanings represented by the physical and material aspects of liturgy. Sometimes the meanings she identifies are accurate reproductions of the teachings of the church and other times the meanings are a product of that congregation and the way they celebrate the Mass. For example, she devotes substantial space to a discussion of how the host (the transubstantiated bread which becomes Jesus' body) is given out only by appointed lay ministers in the main part of the church, whereas in the balcony the host is passed from one person to the other because it is easier. She uses this example to show how the congregation receive conflicting meanings about the importance of the host and how members in the balcony also display a relaxed and communal attitude to the sharing of the host. Her information about the distribution of the host is just a description of the event. The analysis immediately shifts to approved meanings – the dictated official meaning of the host, as opposed to what actually happens during Mass. The performative actions are identified, but not developed as part of the analysis.

In Kelleher's otherwise interesting and valuable study, she hypothesizes about how peoples' beliefs are affected by the conflicting meanings demonstrated by the congregation and laity, but her article is not ultimately about the performance of belief. She focuses directly on whether the communion rite she

[41] Kelleher, p. 101.

witnessed represented an ideal of the rite, as well as whether it represented the doctrines of the church. Despite her awareness of what other analyses have failed to do, at the end of the article she reverts to a comparison based approach to establish the meanings at play in the text. Her research ends up repeating the normative methods for the analysis of performance as she compares what happened in the services with the official meanings as defined by the Roman Catholic Church.

Another writer who is clearly interested in the same sorts of questions is anthropologist Gwen Neville Kennedy whose chapter on anthropology and liturgy takes up the study of the liturgy from a similar point of view to that adopted by Kelleher. Neville Kennedy is a trained anthropologist and practicing Christian who has chosen to research her own society, whereas Kelleher is a liturgical theologian. Neville Kennedy stresses the lack of work done in the West on Christian liturgy: “The particular problems associated with cultural marginality to one’s own religious community are, I am convinced, in part responsible for the absence of ethnographic work on cultural liturgy within Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity.”[42] Neville Kennedy expands the meaning of liturgy to include all the activities that establish rhythm and community amongst a religiously observant group, in this case amongst the Southern Presbyterians in North Carolina, from morning worship to communal meals, storytelling and family reunions. She explains liturgy thus: “The liturgy that accompanies the celebration of this summer-long worship experience is one

[42] Gwen Neville Kennedy and John H. Westerhoff, III, *Learning Through Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 77.

based on family loyalty and religious allegiance, a liturgy growing from and feeding into the value system."[43]

Neville Kennedy emphases the objects used by those she studies, what they eat, where they gather, what they say, how they dress, the patterns to their daily life and worship. She is interested in the physicality and materiality of their religious life as well. The focus of her study in this book is on the role of the anthropologist in facilitating change and understanding religious cultures. She calls for more scholars to research their own religious cultures of origin for the depth of knowledge they can bring to the study itself, but also for the specialised role they can play within the culture. Neville Kennedy's approach is broader in both its content and definition of liturgy than Kelleher's, but is still not a performative analysis of a performance, so much as an analysis of a community. In contrast, Martin Stringer, while still not examining performative actions, seems to have found a middle ground between the two in his study of churches in Manchester.[44]

Martin Stringer presents his research into religious communities and the liturgies they use in the book *On the Perception of Worship*. It comprises four case studies of churches in the Manchester area in the mid 1990s. Stringer's historical approach is thorough and he justifies his use of terms and methodologies from his perspective as an anthropologist and a liturgist. The book looks at how congregations describe and explain what they do in relation to

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[43] Neville Kennedy and Westerhoff, p. 81.
[44] Stringer describes himself as an ethnographer and has written another book on this topic: Stringer, Martin D., and Elisabeth Arweck, *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002). A clear understanding of ethnographic methodologies is essential for anyone undertaking field research about liturgy and othe rritual practices. For more on this see: James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority,' *Representations*, 2 (1983), 118-146 and James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 'The Making of Ethnographic Texts: A Preliminary Report', *Current Anthropology*, 26.2 (1985), 267-271.

worship, what and how they understand, and where this understanding comes from. He is interested in the interplay between what people do in worship services (he explains why he does not use the word liturgy[45]) and the meanings they associate with this behaviour. Given his criticisms of previous theological work from the 1980s that had tried to incorporate ritual theory he is clearly interested in the performed event:

> [Theological analyses] offered a suggestion about where worship should be going, rather than a discussion of how worship was actually being practised. The practice was simply taken for granted and was seen to be out of touch with secular society, theologically moribund and generally in a state of crisis.[46]

His research does not just look at theologians who use some anthropology, but at anthropologists who examine Christian liturgies. As justification for his own work he shows how the anthropologists interested in liturgy privileged a consideration of structure and content over practical applications: "the debate was expressed in terms of what should or should not happen within liturgy rather than what was actually happening in ordinary churches either in Britain or America."[47]

Stringer provides an invaluable glimpse into four different styles of churches and the reader benefits from the fact that he was the primary researcher throughout. His comparisons from one congregation to the next highlight details only accessible through personal experience. He is also aware of how Christian ritual has historically been handled by anthropologists and seems to be intent on contributing scholarship that allows for personal reflections in professional

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[45] Martin Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999), pp. 21-22. For more on the issue of contemporary worship see Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and 'Text Context and Performance: Hermeneutics and the Study of Worship,' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53.3 (2000), 365-279.

[46] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 5.

[47] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 7. For a broader perspective on worship, including articles on Old and New Testament concepts as well as systematic theology see D.A. Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1993).

research. His comment on how anthropology was practiced in the past echoes the statements by Cantwell Smith, Ruel and Pouillon from Chapter 1:

> [W]ithin anthropology…it was considered perfectly normal to use personal reflections on the home society to explain or illustrate aspects of the society being studied on the assumptions that both the anthropologist and the reader of the analysis already knew about the home society and did not have to have it explained. Practically all references to Christian liturgy and worship have been of this kind.[48]

Stringer's book is a valuable resource with its detailed first person accounts of the experience of belonging to the various congregations, but its aim is not to provide an account of the action as much as to explore meaning.

**Performance Approaches**

In contrast to the approaches detailed above, the recent publication, *Faithful Performances* provides a full range of ways of looking at theology and performance and makes a strong case for the inclusion of performative analyses.[49] This collection of essays acknowledges the usefulness of collaborations between theology and performance as Trevor A. Hart explains in the introduction:

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[48] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 8.

[49] Two texts that at least in their titles appear to be relevant are Richard D. McCall's *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), and Roger Grainger's *The Drama of the Rite: Worship, Liturgy and Theatre Performance* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2009). The differences outweigh the similarities and the most significant of these is the focus of both authors on the liturgy as part of the life of the Christian. Their texts presuppose a Christian reader who believes in God. They both promote ways of looking at the liturgy that will enable congregations to better engage with the liturgy. The ways in which they discuss liturgy as performance or drama or theatre is kept to the level of metaphor. McCall does engage with performance studies through the work of Marvin Carlson, Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, among others, but he uses them to discuss social drama and not performativity. He develops a way to read the performance of the liturgy, but applies it to an account of an early medieval liturgy. He also discusses performative action, but it provides an introduction to semiotic modes of analysis, which is a return to representation. His interest in performance theory is similar to mine, but his applications are historical and not contemporary. Much time is spent discussing the history of the associations of drama to the liturgy and there is no focus on belief. The focus of his theoretical section is on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of 'once-occurent-Being-as-event.' (McCall, pp. 67-77) Grainger's book is a handbook for the worshipper. He is interested in what people do in liturgy and suggests ways to engage with liturgy that illuminate meaning and promote a holistic and theologically sound form of worship. There is no discussion of performativity and any linking of the research with wider issues such as anthropology or sociology is cursory.

> Performance, in other words, is not secondary to these forms of artistic engagement with the world, but essential to their artistry. It is therefore very welcome that, in recent decades, there has been a growing theological interest in music and drama precisely as performing arts, and in the performative dimensions of them in particular.[50]

The book includes essays that bring together theological interests with various themes. Among the theological interests are: actions, ethics, violence, the lived experience of faith and identity, Shakespeare, the Renaissance and artistic representations of the Transfiguration. The themes are mainly focussed on drama and theatre: theatre practices, actor training techniques, the dialogical nature of drama, drama as a metaphor, and performance theory. A couple of the authors engage directly with performance studies scholarship,[51] and two of the sections stand out for their applicability to my research: the 'Introduction' by Trevor A. Hart, and Steven R. Guthrie's 'Temples of the Spirit: Worship as Embodied Performance.' Hart discusses the role that drama, theatre and performance can play in scholarly research in theology. Specifically, his explanation of the relevance of performative theories to theology draws on the same kind of interdisciplinary grounding that is at the core of performance studies:

> Indeed, at its starkest, the post-modern appropriation of performance as a paradigm for our engagements with 'reality' insists – after the manner (though not necessarily the spirit) of J.L. Austin's linguistic analysis of various sorts of 'performative utterance' in human discourse – that the meaning of and warrant for even 'scientific' knowledge gained through research and experiment, is not to be had by supposing (wrongly) that it produces an accurate or adequate model of the world. Rather, what is sought here, as Fredrick [sic] Jameson notes, is "a non- or post-referential epistemology" for which truth is a function of performance itself (putting the 'story' or 'text' into play through continuous fresh action) rather than

[50] Hart, 'Introduction', p. 2.
[51] The primary sources used are Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2003); Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskill (eds), *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (London: Routledge, 2004); but the book includes references to and analyses of Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Augusto Boal, Brecht, Marvin Carlson, Chekhov, Merce Cunningham, and others who are regularly discussed in performance studies.

> being measured in terms of the alleged correspondence between some 'text' and a state of affairs lying 'beyond' or 'outside' it.[52]

Hart positions the use of the performative in performance studies style and speaks to the relevance of the performative for theology.

Guthrie's article is an examination of worship and how worship is performed with the body as much as it is cognitively performed with the mind. Here he explains the role of embodied practice in the performance of worship:

> The music and movement of worship become, not an obstacle, nor a supplement to Christian transformation, but a means and resource for that transforming work. They are not the emotional complement to the rational content of worship, but do themselves fund our conceptual vocabulary. As we sing and worship together, Plato's ancient fear is realized:
>
> > [the soul] will, I imagine, be permeated by the corporeal, which fellowship and intercourse with the body will have ingrained its very nature through constant association and long practice.
>
> The old philosopher had it right. Just as mind and imagination may transfigure the flesh, so through long and constant association the body does indeed shape and transfigure the soul. But the image into which we are transformed it is not merely that of our own bodies. Rather, as we offer our bodies in worship (musical and of other sorts) we lay hold of resources the Holy Spirit may use to transform us into the image of Christ. These frail and mortal bodies become singing, dancing, kneeling temples; their very gestures and patterns of bodily experience tracing out the dimensions of a space in which the Holy Spirit may live and work.[53]

Guthrie emphasises that embodied performance is not simply an expression of an interior state, but forms that person. Bodily experience is understood to be implicated in the state of the soul; not simply a by product of having a body. Theology is in the process of engaging more and more with approaches that include the role of the entire person. This can only be good for the field and for the breadth of research across related fields.

This literature review of theology takes various perspectives and approaches into account. Many of the philosophical issues raised in the previous

[52] Hart, 'Introduction', p. 4.
[53] Steven Guthrie, 'Temples of the Spirit: Worship as Embodied Performance,' in Hart and Guthrie, pp. 91-107 (pp. 106-7).

chapter have surfaced here as well. The relationship between and understanding of the body/mind/soul is just as relevant today as it was in Plato's time. While the performative has begun to be referenced in more literature, it has still not been used systematically to analyse performances of the liturgy. The next section adds another perspective through an examination of both historical and contemporary anthropological methodologies employed to analyse ritual.

### ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND CHRISTIANITY

In Chapter 1 we looked briefly at some of the ways in which anthropology and ritual studies deal with belief and meaning-making. In this section methodologies are the focus. Methodologies developed by anthropology have become standard practice around the world and adopted by innumerable other fields for field research and case studies. Performance studies is one of these fields heavily influenced by anthropology. The history of the collaborations between theatre studies and anthropology which is said to have led to the development of performance studies is well known. Retelling part of this history provides context before introducing recent shifts in anthropology that are changing how religious ritual is studied.

Collaborations between anthropology and theatre studies began in the 1970s. Anthropologists were interested in expanding their analyses of rituals to include elements of practice and to take into account theoretical concerns which theatre studies had long been examining. Theatre studies was interested in the methodologies of the participant-observer which had been developed by anthropologists working in the field, as well as the long history of the study of rituals. As many cultures do not differentiate between ritual artistic practices,

events which had come under the study of ritual, for example Indian styles such as Kathakali, were equally suited to be analysed as theatre or, the new term that was gaining in usage, performance.[54] The powerful influence of anthropology on performance studies, with its emphasis on 'other' cultural systems has also affected the topics studied.[55]

During the foundational years of performance studies participant-observation was used to study ritual/theatrical/religious practices in cultures where the boundaries between various art forms and religion were more blurred than in the West. The participant-observer provided information in two intimately connected ways: via an outside critical eye that maintained an almost scientific distance from the object of study, as well as from an inside subjective position that contributed, for example, feelings and embodied responses. For all of its benefits in relation to the study of other cultures, this approach tended to cast the culture in question as exotic or 'other.' While both anthropology and performance studies acknowledge the negative effects of othering in studying spiritual ritual practices few studies acknowledge that this methodology has also *privileged* non-Western rituals.[56] The participant-observer method does not, of course, preclude its use by those already part of a culture – an Indian can study the rituals of India

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[54] There are many discussions of this history; see Richard Schechner, *Ritual Play and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences Theatre* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), *Performance Studies an Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors* (Cornell University Press, 1975), *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ, 1986); Peggy Phelan, and Jill Lane, *The Ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[55] Elements of this argument have appeared in: Megan Macdonald, 'The Liturgical Lens: Performance Art and Christianity', *Performance Research: On Congregation*, 13 (2008), 146-153.

[56] See Rustom Bharucha, 'Collison of Cultures: Some Western Interpretations and Uses of the Indian Theatre,' in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, (New York: Routledge,1993), pp. 13-41. And Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (London: Duke University Press, 2006).

– but its history has been predicated on the idea that there is more value in the 'other.' An outcome of this tradition is that Western scholars tend to explain the practices they do study in relation to other cultures (I will look at this in detail in Chapter 4 in relation to Marina Abramović's work.) instead of looking at their own.

The participant-observer method developed out of anthropology and the style of language use is indicative of a field trying to prove its secular-scientific credentials. The tendency is to use a slightly detached approach for description and evocative wording for personal experience. Performance studies adopted these methods and gained both the methods and the history of the development of the methods. As already discussed through Pouillon's work, language carries within it more than just the dictionary definition of a term; cultural assumptions are embedded within.

Anthropologists had for decades been making culturally-specific and misleading assumptions similar to those highlighted by Pouillon in his analysis of Dangaleat. The impact of the participant-observer method meant that the spiritually significant experiences from the cultures studied by performance scholars were sometimes transposed into the language of the scholar to detrimental effects. Scholars overlooked the way language itself functions in relation to the concepts of belief, religion and spirituality.[57] Far from only making this mistake when studying other cultures, they also repeated the error in relation to their own cultures.

[57] This will be picked up again in Chapter 4.

It was not until the end of the twentieth century that Western anthropologists began to examine the histories of their own cultures.[58] From its origins, anthropology looked outwards and performance studies followed this paradigm. In contrast to this, and as already discussed early in this chapter, the study of religious rituals in Europe or North America has been the province of religious institutions and theologians. Where Christian practices have been examined in theatre or performance research, they are mostly discussed in relation to their *theatricality*, and not in relation to their belief systems, bodily or spiritual practices.[59] In the last few years the topic of Christianity has been receiving more attention in anthropological research.[60] One publication in particular has sought to redress the lack of research into Christian practices. Fenella Cannell's *The Anthropology of Christianity* (2006), contains twelve essays by anthropologists researching manifestations of Christianity from around the world. This work is welcome both for the scope of the essays and for the

[58] There has always been work that has looked at Christian practices but rarely has the anthropologist been a practicing Christian. One notable exception to this is Victor Turner. He and his wife Edith published a book on pilgrimage after they had converted to Roman Catholicism. See Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

[59] For examples of this see Vicki Ann Cremona, 'Re-Enacting the Passion during the Holy Week Rituals in Malta', *Theatre Annual: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 51 (1998), 32-53; Harris, Max, 'Saint Sebastian and the Blue-Eyed Blacks: Corpus Christi in Cusco, Peru', *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies*, Spring 47.1 [T177], (2003) ,149-75; Harrison, Paul Carter, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards, eds, *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple, 2002).

[60] For the full discussion of this re-emerging topic see Fenella Cannell's *The Anthropology of Christianity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, eds, *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*, (New York: Berghahn, 2006), and *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, by Webb Keane, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). John Barker's reviews of these books appear in 'Toward an Anthropology of Christianity – Book Review', *American Anthropologist*, 110.3 (2008), 377–381**.** As well, see Cannell's article the **'**The Christianity of Anthropology', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11.2 **(**2005) **,**335-356; and Joel Robbins, **'**Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology*, 48.1 (2007), 5-38. As well, some precussors to these ideas can be found in Clifford Geertz, 'Shifting Aims, Moving Targets: On the Anthropology of Religion', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11 (2004), 1-15; 'Religion as a Cultural System,' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 87-125; and David Hicks, ed., *Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

provocative introduction by Cannell which challenges the role played by Christianity in the history and development of, and subsequent research in, anthropology.

Cannell's work describes a field that has been trying to ignore its religious roots to the detriment of its ability to objectively examine Christianity:

> Christianity has functioned as "the repressed" of anthropology over the period of the formation of the discipline. And, as the repressed always does, it keeps on staging returns. The complexity of the relationship between Christianity and anthropology has in fact been pointed out early, well and repeatedly, if only by a few.[61]

Christian influences and logics have been 'hiding' within the field. Despite most anthropologists coming from a Western cultural background these logics and influences have remained largely unacknowledged. In fact, the study of Christianity has for decades been almost completely ignored by social scientists:

> The complex relationship between Christian theology and anthropological theory, a perception of which still lingers in early theory, was increasingly backgrounded as time went on. Anthropology came to believe without much qualification its own claims to be a secular discipline, and failed to notice that it had in fact incorporated a version of Augustinian or ascetic thinking within its own theoretical apparatus, even in the claim to absolute secularism itself.[62]

This is the central point of Cannell's thesis – that Christianity is embedded in the very theoretical foundations of anthropology through a version, albeit a fourth century version, of one strand of Christian thought. She substantiates this claim through examples both from the distant past, such as St. Augustine as well as from contemporary research.

Cannell begins her introduction to the book, *The Anthropology of Christianity,* by asking, "What difference does Christianity make? What difference does it make to how people at different times and in different places

[61] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 4.
[62] Fenella Cannell, 'The Christianity of Anthropology', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11.2 (2005), 335-356 (p. 341).

understand themselves and the world? And what difference does it make to the kinds of questions we are able to ask about social process?"[63] Her answers start with theoretical concerns by tracing part of the history of anthropological and sociological thought through examples from Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Max Weber. These men are highlighted because their work was instrumental in the formation of the discipline as secular and contributed to Christianity being associated with social and cultural issues, and yet they still treated the religion as an important and distinctive element in Western history.[64] For these three secular theorists it was not a problem to engage with the various forms in which Christianity was a part of Western society.

In contrast, Cannell is troubled by the way Christianity has since been almost totally relegated to a shaper of social process in secular countries. She finds it ironic that the work of Durkheim, Mauss and Weber has also become caught up in narrow readings used to argue for teleological understandings of society that posit that all societies follow the same path from superstition to institutional religion to secularity.[65] As such, Christianity, in its interaction with the social sciences, is understood as a "secondary or contributory aspect" of social changes, in this case, secularization and global modernity.[66] The potential scope of Christianity as a dynamic form of religious and spiritual expression concerned with transformation is impeded when placed in a theoretical corner. Yet this, according to Cannell, has been the dominant perspective taken on religion by the social sciences in the last century.

[63] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 1.
[64] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 1.
[65] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 2.
[66] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 3.

Cannell addresses another answer to the questions in her examination of the almost discipline-wide claim that anthropology is a secular science. Her criticism is mostly based on anthropology's 'exaggerated resistance' to acknowledging the relevance of others religious beliefs and experiences.[67] The results of this resistance are methods which allow for the documentation of religious experience and then question the entire nature of performance. This rejection is worthy of the tradition of the antitheatrical prejudice mentioned earlier. As Cannell explains: "Religious phenomena in anthropology may be described in detail, but must be explained on the basis that they have no foundation in reality, but are epiphenomena of "real" underlying sociological, political, economic, or other material causes."[68] In other words, any reference to religious/spiritual experiences must be interpreted and re-assigned meaning in relation to that which can be quantified. Any part of a religious/spiritual experience which is banal is acceptable, for example, the description of how adherents relate to each other over coffee or organise themselves into groups. Aspects that raise issues of religious/spiritual experience, transformation, or transcendence, must be accounted for in other rational ways.[69]

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[67] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 3.

[68] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 3.

[69] Transformation in this dissertation refers to spiritual transformation. There are various ways to define what this means. Kenneth I. Pargament offers a good explanation of the breadth of the topic in 'The Meaning of Spiritual Transformation', in *Spiritual Transformation and Healing: Anthropological, Theological, Neuroscientific, and Clinical Perspectives*, ed. by Joan D. Koss-Chioino and Philip Hefner (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2006), pp. 10-24. As Pargament explains: "At its heart, spiritual transformation refers to a fundamental change in the place of the sacred or the character of the sacred in the life of the individual. […]The individual can reorient himself to a new religious group or to universal concerns" (p. 18). The reorientation of the individual is a key component in transformation and one that Cannell seems to be referring to above. She discusses the reluctance of the field to take seriously the reorientation that people experience. This is what Pargament would call a primary spiritual transformation, however there are also secondary spiritual transformations and these "have to do with changes not in goals or destinations, but in the pathways people take to the sacred" (p. 20). This seems to be more in line with the kind of transformation that happens through the encounters I describe in the case studies. These involve participating in events, or with groups, or in new experiences that relate to a set of values. As these values change people add and subtract the activities and practices that go with the values. In

What participants recount about their own transformative experiences is only admissible insofar as it provides a record of what happened. Any association of these phenomena with the spiritual is discounted. The spiritual aspects of religious practice are thus divorced from their sources – the rituals performed by believers are linked to social and cultural causes. Cannell points out the level of opposition that exists in the field:

> It is not necessary to be a believer in any faith, or to abandon an interest in sociological enquiry, to wonder why the discipline has needed to protest quite so much about such widely distributed aspects of human experience.[70]

The exaggerated resistance to religious topics has, however, not resulted in the same treatment for all practices.[71] Cannell reasons that all religious phenomena are difficult for the social sciences to accept, but writes that Christianity, as the dominant Western religion, has been treated simultaneously with extreme caution and derision:

> In the context of this disciplinary nervousness about religious experience in general, the topic of Christianity has provoked more anxiety than most other religious topics. It has seemed at once the most tediously familiar and the most threatening of the religious traditions for a social science that has developed within contexts in which the heritage of European philosophy, and therefore of Christianity, tends to predominate.[72]

As Webb Keane says in the epilogue to the book, “Christianity has not only been avoided by the mainstream of the anthropological tradition, it also lurks as the suppressed core of much of what goes under the name of Western Culture.”[73] What was suppressed perhaps needed to be – in order to allow for the processes

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this case, participants in the performance art piece in Chapter 4, if they experience any transformation, are opening themselves up to a non-traditional pathway to the sacred.

[70] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 3.

[71] For a detailed examination of all aspects of ritual and religion, including a section on liturgy see Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[72] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 3.

[73] Webb Keane, ‘Epilogue: Anxious Transcendence’, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. by Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 308-323 (p. 308).

which brought about, among other things, a radical shift in conceptions of science and art. According to Keane modern secular society came to believe that "the defining practices of modernity such as scientific procedure, bureaucratic rationality, nationalist politics, free markets, and the liberation of art of art's sake, both depended on and contributed to processes of secularization."[74] While this is no longer held to be completely accurate, the result of such thinking was that the process of secularization was severed from the cultural status quo which came before. In other words, the social sciences "had to forget the sources of their core questions and concepts in a world for which Christianity was both pervasive background and specific instigation for research and theorization."[75] This 'forgetting' of the past has had its consequences; contemporary Western thinking is, according to Keane, "haunted" by "these repressed origins" and "this haunting is evident in their core concerns with and ways of conceptualizing the self, objectification, agency, authority, power, and materialism."

While Keane highlights these concerns to further develop his argument with examples from ethnographic research, the value of this analysis for the present study is its insistence that the preoccupations of modernity echo the concerns of Christianity.[76] It is not a surprise that this should be the case, and many anthropologists have contributed to research which moves the study of Christianity back to a central position in the field. However, most of the studies from the 1980s and 1990s "share a tendency to subordinate Christianity as a

[74] Keane, 'Epilogue', p. 308.
[75] Keane, 'Epilogue', p. 308.
[76] It is important to note, as does Keane, that there are multiple reasons for any manifestations of social or cultural practices. I am not advocating a position whereby any practice in Western society has to find its Judeo-Christian source, but in a time where theorists from a variety of fields are looking again at the roots of Western culture, it is necessary to re-evaluate accepted positions.

religion of transcendence to its institutional forms or its services to this-worldly problems with which the secular scholar, naturally feels more at home."[77]

What is it about Christianity which makes it so difficult to address as a religion of transcendence? Cannell raises one common misunderstanding which is at the core of Christian belief: the paradox of the relationship of the body to the soul:

> ...as historians of the early church [...] have clearly shown, part of its distinctive character is that it is essentially built on a paradox. The central doctrines of the Christian faith are the Incarnation (by which God became human flesh in Christ) and the Resurrection (by which, following Christ's redemptive death on the Cross, all Christians are promised physical resurrection at the Last Judgment). Although most writing on Christianity in the social sciences has focused on its ascetic aspects, on the ways in which Christian teaching tends to elevate the spirit above the flesh, Christian doctrine in fact always also has this other aspect, in which the flesh is an essential part of redemption. As Brown in particular shows, this ambivalence exists not just in theory, but as part of the lived practice and experience of Christians.[78]

This paradox was already mentioned in Chapter 1, in the context of Nancey Murphy's work. As the Resurrection is key to Christian belief its emphasis on physicality and materiality is also key to the performance of belief. To overlook one part of this paradox leads to false analyses of the practices of the church, and to compromised theoretical understandings. If the goal of the ritual is limited to freeing the soul from the body, or redeeming the body from the sins of the soul, the complexity and accuracy of the ritual is lost.[79] Over years of reducing most references to Christian ritual to a discussion of 'social causes,' 'secularization' and 'asceticism,' its history and influence have been occluded, in part by a failure

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[77] Keane, 'Epilogue', p. 309.
[78] Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, p. 7.
[79] Dallas Willard makes the point that "*any* religion must be in some significant degree ascetic—admitted or not, consistent or not." If it were otherwise, "[i]t would mean that those conditions that constitute the nature of religious life are all attainable by "natural" growth, by external imposition, or by direct acts of will and that purpose-filled preparation and training and taking pains to learn are entirely irrelevant." Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: Harper, 1988), p. 136.

to comprehend the significance of its physical and material practices as a component of belief.

Asceticism is a physical and material practice which I want to briefly mention because it has been a factor in the misreading of the performance of belief in relation to materiality and performativity. Ascetic thought is itself complicated within the Christian tradition. It has mostly been conceptualised as a negative aspect of religious practice, but ascetic practices are not in and of themselves negative. According to Dallas Willard, "self-denial, the disciplining of one's natural impulses – happens to be a central teaching of the New Testament."[80] Willard lists examples from the Judeo-Christian tradition of the ascetic including fasting, praying, seeking solitude, and the giving up of oneself to humankind and to God.[81] It is not just secular society which has turned away from such practices, it is contemporary Christianity as well.[82] Part of rejecting ascetic practices stems from a fundamental misconception about how Christianity understands the physical and material. The kinds of issues raised by both Murphy and Cannell seek to redress the balance of research into Christianity and to provide clearer analyses of the roles of the physical and material nature of belief.

Before moving onto the case studies I want to mention one example from the social sciences of work that aims to address the entire person as a unit even while it acknowledges the effects of metaphysical thinking. Cultural and psychological anthropologist Thomas Csordas has undertaken research that understands the limits of representational models in relation to beliefs, but his psychological approach is at a significant remove from the performance theory

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[80] Willard, p. 133.
[81] Willard, p. 136.
[82] This topic is of concern to this dissertation, but a full discussion of the problem is not needed in order to understand the relevance of ascetic practices.

that I am pursuing. In this passage he is talking about healing and calling for a way to break free from traditional methods of analysis:

> Understanding healing in terms of representation is not adequate because, even though concepts such as performance and persuasion have substantial experiential force, ultimately representation appeals to the model of a text. No matter how successful literary scholars might be in animating texts, in bringing them to life, textual(ist) interpretations remain inflections of experience, slightly to the side of immediacy. The missing ingredient is supplied by the notion of being-in-the-world, from phenomenological philosophy, insofar as it speaks of immediacy, indeterminacy, sensibility—all that has to do with the vividness and urgency of experience. My attempt to place these ideas in dialogue rests on the proposition that if studies of representation are carried out from the standpoint of textuality, then complementary studies of being-in-the-world can be carried out from the standpoint of embodiment.[83]

Csordas positions representation and embodiment as elements to be analysed in much the same way that I position representation and performative analysis. He too wants to move away from the "model of a text." Consonance across disciplines highlights a shift in thinking that is cross-cultural and immediately relevant.

The methods examined in this section help to explain why Christian practices and performance have not been well analysed by the fields of anthropology and related social sciences. Anthropology's awareness of its own lack is leading to new research and renewal in methodological approaches. However, the analysis of performance is still the purview of performance studies, to which we will now turn in the last section of this chapter.

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[83] Thomas J. Csordas, *Body / Meaning / Healing* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 3. See also: *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (London: University of California Press, 1997); and *Embodiment and experience: The existential ground of culture and self*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

**THEORIES OF RECEPTION**

There is one other area of research to explore before proceeding to the specifics of the case studies. Audience reception and spectatorship theory focus on research that documents and explains the complex relations between the production and reception of theatre. As I have already emphasised, the liturgy is structured for active participation and yet it is most often analysed as if there is but one reaction and one set of meanings. This same problem recurs in theatre studies, where sweeping claims are made about what 'an audience' experienced and understood. In the following two case studies, and specifically in relation to the liturgies and the discussion of Abramović's *The House With the Ocean View*, I argue for a mode of analysis that grounds actions and meaning production in the specific and unique moments of performance. To situate my analysis in the larger theoretical context, this brief outline of current discussions in the field of theatre introduces three writers: Jacques Rancière, Gay McAuley and Helen Freshwater.[84]

Jacques Rancière argues in *The Emancipated Spectator* for a shift away from the common understandings of the 'spectator' by telling a story of knowledge and ignorance.[85] He uses examples of how theatre has been understood to illustrate the importance of examining intellectual emancipation and the question of the spectator today. The initial story is about a schoolteacher who attempts to show his student what lies between her and ignorance. He sets out to teach her what he knows and thereby provide her with knowledge. His

[84] Most of the quotations in this section use the terms spectator, audience and actor. In relation to the case studies on liturgy and performance art I use the terms facilitator and participant. It is awkward to continually restate the terms that I prefer while using a quote from another writer. For the purposes of this section, the reader should assume, e.g. that I do not think that a congregation in the liturgy is an audience or that the priest is an actor.

[85] Parts of this section appear in Megan Macdonald, 'Performing the National Interest? *Mother Courage* at the National Theatre in London and Ottawa', *Performance Research*, 16 (2011), 57-64.

position is a difficult one because in order to teach the student what the teacher knows the teacher must remain at all times ahead of the student, consistently reaffirming the difference between their positions. This, argues Rancière, is what has happened in the debates about theatre from the time of Plato. Theatre has been defined in relation to the spectator and a gulf has been created between the stage and the audience that is constantly reified.

Rancière's retelling of the historical perspective on the spectator reveals the complex set of relations surrounding art and the political. The model of rationality under discussion comes down to what he calls the paradox of the spectator: in other words, that there is no theatre without the spectator, and yet, being a spectator is always negative because viewing is positioned as opposite to both knowing acting. To be a spectator is to be in a position of ignorance. The two main approaches to solving this problem, that Rancière uses as examples, are demonstrated in Artaud's theatre of cruelty and Brecht's epic theatre. Rancière explains what Artaud attempted to do:

> The spectator must be removed from the position of observer calmly examining the spectacle offered to her. She must be disposed of this illusory mastery, drawn into the magic circle of theatrical action where she will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of being in possession of all her vital energies.[86]

The other option comes from Brecht's theories. Either the spectator 'will be shown a strange, unusual spectacle, a mystery whose meaning he must seek out,' or, 'he will be offered an exemplary dilemma, similar to those facing human beings engaged in decisions about how to act. In this way, he will be led to hone his own sense of the evaluation of reasons, of their discussion and of the choice that arrives at a decision.'[87]

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[86] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 4.
[87] Rancière, p. 4

These theories are well known in the field of theatre, as are the various attempts that have been made to use them, indeed at times to combine them, to reach the spectator. Yet Rancière asserts that neither approach is sufficient, as the desire to abolish the distance between actor and spectator is to recreate it over again by reinforcing that it exists in the first place. Instead Rancière asks that we take the school teacher and the student as an example and approach the question from a different angle. The school teacher cannot suppose the student has no knowledge, as she has somehow managed to learn many things in life and is capable of learning more. And the way she learns is by comparing that which is new to that which she already knows, thereby creating her own links and understandings. The teacher thus needs to guide her, not to the knowledge that he already possesses, but to a fuller understanding of how to use her intelligence to translate signs into other signs. In this way distance is seen not as an evil to be abolished, but as the normal condition of any communication.

To apply this to the theatre, and other performance forms, Rancière asks that we overcome the distance between spectator and actor by using performance to draw spectators out of a passive attitude, thereby transforming them into active participants in a shared world. To dissolve the prevalent dichotomies Rancière calls for action: 'Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting. The spectator acts: she observes, selects, compares and interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages.'[88] The traditional approach to this challenge is to try to redistribute those sitting in the theatre space by either physically moving them, or pointing out to them that they are in a theatre, but these methods do not assemble or build

[88] Rancière, p. 13.

a community or public. Rancière argues against a theatre experience that is explained only as community; for as much as those present are all in the same space, it is the ability of each person to engage as an individual that should be the goal. This theory offers a concrete avenue to move past representative analyses of spectators and their presumed passivity:

> What our performances verify...is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations.[89]

In other words, it is ultimately the possibilities of interaction created in the performance space that lead to embodied participation. Getting people involved is a recurrent theme in liturgical theology and Rancière's insistence on anonymity and non-community as conditions for participation can help us think about liturgy. One can come together around, in and through a liturgy without actually being a community, and maybe that is important to the function of the liturgy, that strangers and visitors can take part.

Rancière's writings are primarily theoretical, and so the next contribution to this discussion comes from performance studies scholar Gay McAuley whose work focuses on history and examples. In her book *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, McAuley situates the role of the audience in the entire performance space from a historical perspective, as well as drawing out the key elements of spectatorship:

> The condition of spectatorship in the theatre thus involves the physical presence of both performers and spectators, the complex play of fiction and reality, the equally complex play of looks between performers and spectators, the multiple frames that enable this complexity to be experienced and the freedom for the individual spectator to foreground

[89] Rancière, p. 17.

> one frame or another at different moments and to construct his or her own sequence of events and signs.[90]

This list takes into account the various experiences that happen to all those present at an event, while still recognizing that each individual may have a unique perspective. One element that requires further explanation is the play of fiction and reality. McAuley lists three terms – dramatic fiction, presentational reality, and social reality of the total event – that she claims are constantly shifting in balance for the spectator during the performance. She also clarifies that some kinds of performance have "sought to accentuate one of these terms at the expense of the other two, [...] in task-based performance such as that of the Wooster Group [...] the dramatic fiction is displaced by the presentational, and in happenings the emphasis is on the reality of the spectator's experience.[91] The liturgy draws more closely on the 'reality of the spectator's experience, and the performance art of Marina Abramović on the presentational reality. While neither form has a sustained dramatic fiction they share the other two styles of presentation.

McAuley focuses on how the entire performance situation is embedded[92] in the social: "The experience of the individual spectator, while always personal, is also occurring at group and collective levels."[93] The social experiences are foregrounded in both the liturgy (where a group of people interact socially both before, during and after a service) and Abramović's gallery based events (where groups interact in the multiple areas of the gallery spaces). In the liturgy, and Abramović's *The House With the Ocean View*, the participants and facilitators

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[90] Gay McAuley, 'The Spectator in the Space'. *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 235-277 (p. 274).
[91] McAuley, p. 251.
[92] "The performance is embedded in a social event, and both the performance and the fiction it presents are constantly at risk of being overtaken by the social" (McAuley, p. 248).
[93] McAuley, p. 251.

can see each other, as well being able to observe other people in the room. Whether in the theatre or in these performance situations what is enabled is what McAuley calls the play of looks which are – Spectator/Actor, Actor/Spectator and Spectator/Spectator.[94] It is clear that the spectator is in control of the direction of two of these looks. The play of looks is one indicator in the larger discussion of levels of engagement and participation. Among other results from an analysis of the play of looks, McAuley makes a strong case for what is often called an energy exchange in theatre writing:

> what is evident from the scattered references in published sources such as actor's memoirs is that spectators in the theatre are far from passive, that the live presence of both performers and spectators creates complex flows of energy between both groups, and that it is even questionable whether what is going on can be discussed in terms of stimulus and response.[95]

What is most interesting in this argument is her reluctance to attribute participation in the theatrical event to a 'stimulus and response' style of organization. Here McAuley's ideas dovetail neatly with Rancière's call to think past the traditional modes of understanding how information is created and transmitted in performance. There is no play of opposites in the performance situation in terms of who is active and who is passive – all are implicated.

Rancière and McAuley are both also interested in resisting broad claims made on behalf of the perceived power of the performance situation:

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[94] There is also an Actor/Actor look but this is complicated by the difficulty of establishing whether the looks on stage are between characters or actors or both. In the case of the liturgy, there is usually a team of people facilitating the action whose 'looks' do not disrupt the presentational reality nor the social situation in the same way as the Actor/Actor or Character/Character could. In Abramović's piece she is the only person performing so there is no other play of looks by the facilitator for which we have not already accounted.

[95] McAuley, p. 247. Historically, most claims on the experience of the audience "seem to be largely speculative" however, "theatre practitioners, notably actors, gain a great deal of intuitive knowledge about audience response through their years of performance practice" (McAuley, p. 238). As well, she returns in the article to the idea that the actors can read what the audience are doing. "If actors can read the mood of the audience with this degree of precision, then it must be being signaled in some way" (p. 247).

> Yet another factor that complicates the task of theorizing theoretical spectatorship is the way claims are made about theatre that seem to be based not on the experience of actual performances but on either a kind of virtual performance imagined on the basis of reading playtexts or on the assumption that theatre functions like some other performance practice. For example […] film.[96]

Focussing on playtexts as the site of all knowledge about a performance is the same problem as analysing the liturgical text instead of the performance of the liturgy. The live event, and one that includes live facilitators as well as participants, is key to the kind of performance analysis that I am pursuing because it relies on the present actions of the bodies in the space.

There is a huge variety of audience response and much of it can be seen and apprehended by others in the space. McAuley references a full range of behaviours written down by theatre producers, such as "laughter, sighs, whistling, people leaving, scuffling"[97] as well as the actions seen in lithographs and drawings from Hogarth and Daumier which show audience members in various states of "active behaviour."[98] Bodies in any space prove distracting and are a constant reminder in participatory events of the demands put on all the bodies present:

> In the theatre the scopic drive is always being subverted or displaced, either because of the reality of the actors' bodies and the performance space intrude themselves, thereby disrupting the fiction, or through the periodic return to the social due to the physical presence of other spectators and the institutionalized breaks in the performance, or because the performance itself demands active participation.[99]

Liturgical action and performance art do not include the same kind of 'fiction,' but they each contain sections that require more or less attention from participants; either because the sections are demanding in terms of, e.g. call and

[96] McAuley, pp. 238-239.
[97] McAuley, p. 238.
[98] McAuley, p. 240.
[99] McAuley, p. 239.

response, or because there is a shift in style of action from, e.g. quiet to loud or stillness to lots of movement. All of this is visible to those in the space even if individual responses to these moments cannot be catalogued without interviewing each person. In the following analysis of the liturgy I am not interested in accounting for individual responses as much as demonstrating the potential of the event to create responses that implicate those present in multiple ways.

Where McAuley provides primarily historical and theoretical examples in her study of audience reception, Helen Freshwater's book *Theatre & Audience* is an overview of contemporary theatre and performance practice. This book incorporates both an historical review of theoretical positions and a thematic overview of the relationships that exist between performers and audiences with direct reference to contemporary performance practices. Freshwater lists the same arguments to which Rancière and McAuley draw attention:

> Several barriers block a better understanding of the relationship between theatre and its audiences. One is the tendency to confuse individual and group response; another is the persistent circulation of exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims about theatre's influence and impact.[100]

The issue of the relationship between individual and group responses is very important. Much audience response theory makes the case for systematic research incorporating audience interviews. While I do not disagree with this as one way to provide more balanced research, it is not the only method that will yield relevant data and perspectives on the experience of the spectator.

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[100] Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5. She goes on to further specify what a writer needs to take into account about the audience: "So, although it is possible to speak of 'an audience,' it is important to remember that there may be several distinct, co-existing audiences to be found among the people gathered together to watch a show and that each individual within this group may choose to adopt a range of viewing positions. Moreover, awareness of these differences requires that statements about audience response be framed in careful, conditional terms, sensitive to tendencies to generalise about audiences and to judge them without evidence" (pp. 9-10).

If the desired effect of a piece of writing is to review or analyse how a play or performance was received or understood, then interviews are imperative. However, even with audience responses collected, an analysis would still have to take place of the information provided. As I have demonstrated in the literature review, it is difficult for writers to break away from traditional, i.e. representational, approaches of analysis. Freshwater acknowledges that "there may be more substantial problems with using concepts, principles, and theoretical models to analyse theatre that were originally generated in response to reading, writing, or watching film."[101] Such models were not developed with spectators in mind, as Marvin Carlson explains "a frustrated reader may simply put the book aside and turn to something else. The theatre, as a social event, encourages more active resistance" or as Freshwater adds, "more frustrated submission."[102] It is in this regard that a performance analysis that accepts the performance situation as the norm, and assumes that what happens to each person in the space is important, is better positioned to analyse the elements specific to an event. When coupled with an awareness of the dynamics of audience reception this approach can reveal other elements of the event that are otherwise overlooked.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has brought together three types of literature reviews from three disciplinary areas – theology, anthropology and performance studies. They all contribute to some common threads in the dissertation:

1) There is a lack of serious academic work acknowledging liturgy as performative.

[101] Freshwater, pp. 14-15.
[102] Marvin Carlson, quoted in Freshwater, p. 15.

2) Christianity historically has been sidelined as a relevant topic of study, one that has recently been re-energized by anthropology.

3) Analyses of liturgy and performance demand that all the participants present in the space, whether facilitators or congregation, be taken into account for both their experience and their contribution to the event.

Contemporary writing on the role and nature of the performance event, as evidenced by Rancière, McAuley and Freshwater, shows that there is a need for other methodological approaches to performance analysis. It is both necessary and possible to provide an analysis that foregrounds the performative action of participation. In the next chapter I apply the theories developed in the opening chapters to a case study of Christian ritual.

# CHAPTER 3
# PERFORMING THE SPIRITUAL THROUGH THE MATERIAL

The Roman Catholic Mass is a performance form that has been handed down through generations linking participants with both historical moments and people. As a present-day event it is used many times in the course of one week and adapted to the individual country, language, area and building in which it is presented. When performed, it is both the realisation of the Mass as an entity unto itself, and an act "rendering a service to [the Mass], which [is] assumed to have an existence over and above any possible performance of [it]."[1] The original source of this quotation is from Christopher Small's book *Music of the Common Tongue* where he discusses contemporary understandings of the performance of classical music. Small concludes that Western understandings of music place the meaning of the event in the individual piece of music rather than in the work done by those present to produce to the music. Small suggests that instead of asking, "What does this composition mean?" the question should be "What does it mean when this performance takes place at this time, in this place, with these musicians, before this audience?"[2] This question fits nicely when thought of in relation to the performance of the liturgy that occurs thousands of times each week in churches around the world.

This chapter is a detailed case study of my experiences of the Roman Catholic liturgy over Easter week in the Czech Republic in 2005. I begin by providing historical background to the development of the liturgy that focuses on changes brought in by both the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council.

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[1] Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (London: John Calder, 1987), p. 50. The original reads, "the act of performance is seen as rendering a service to those [sonic] objects, which are assumed to have an existence over and above any possible performance of them."
[2] Small, *Music*, p. 51-2.

I also develop the various ways meaning is made through physical and material means, i.e. through the embodied practices of the liturgy (physical), and with use of the main objects of the Eucharist (material). In this section I also rehearse the theological meanings of the Eucharist. This chapter begins to address the philosophical and theoretical issues raised in Chapter 1 as well as the disciplinary issues of analysis and methodology from theology, anthropology and performance studies raised in Chapter 2.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC LITURGY AS PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL PROCESS

### History

The origins of the Christian liturgy are in the first century CE and aspects of early church practice have already been mentioned. While the liturgy changed and evolved in each century, it was not until the time of the Council of Trent in 1563 that large scale, organised, liturgical reform was undertaken.[3] Changes effected at this point set four hundred years of reformed liturgical performance in motion. While there were still wide ranging differences to be found between practices in various countries, the church had started to think through the implications of the performance of worship, which was subsequently adapted in each generation.

The Roman Catholic Church's position on the development of the liturgy is important for our understanding of the rites and rituals examined in this chapter. As Alcuin Reid explains, an organic development is the ideal:

> Organic development holds openness to growth (prompted by pastoral needs) and continuity with Tradition in due proportion. It listens to scholarly *desiderata* and considers anew the value of practices lost in the passage of time, drawing upon them to improve liturgical Tradition gradually, only if and when this is truly necessary. Ecclesiastical authority

[3] The Council of Trent started in 1545 and ended in 1563. It was not until 1563 that the reforms were announced and implemented.

> supervises this growth, at times making prudential judgements about what is appropriate in the light of the needs of different ages, but always taking care that liturgical Tradition is never impoverished, and that what is handed on is truly that precious heritage received from our fathers, perhaps judiciously pruned and carefully augmented (but not wholly reconstructed), according to the circumstances of the Church in each age, ensuring continuity of belief and of practice.[4]

The overall intention, then, of the Roman Catholic Church towards the liturgy, is to match official changes to the contemporary needs of congregations while maintaining the traditions of the past. The performances of the liturgy that I describe later in the chapter are a combination of traditions and the current needs of the congregations.

"Ensuring continuity of belief" is difficult to measure over time, and other writers have argued that the belief held by practitioners has little to do with theological concerns as articulated by those who study and implement church doctrine. The theological concerns do, however, shape the written text of the liturgy and the meanings that are taught to priests and congregations. The official meanings may not always be understood by every participant, but they nevertheless impact upon the performance that takes place each week. While the Council of Trent could not have accounted for every liturgical participant over the subsequent 400 years, the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), took the Christian performance of the individual very seriously.

The last major change to the liturgy was undertaken as part of Vatican II in 1963, exactly four hundred years after the council of Trent. The official development of the Roman Catholic liturgy, its meanings and modes of participation, are weighed carefully by a committee whose job it is to oversee the

[4] Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (Farnborough: St. Michael's Abbey Press, 2004), p. 290.

liturgy.[5] Vatican II was made up of many committees, including the Sacrosanctum Concilium which was responsible for the liturgy:

> [Where the Council of] Trent had been essentially conservative, trying to fit broken pieces back together in a familiar form, the second Vatican Council went in the other direction, shattering many time-worn patterns of Roman Catholic worship, yet at the same time trying to recover much of value from the totality of tradition.[6]

What James F. White addresses are two major strands of changes that the council decided upon. One strand integrated some of the oldest surviving traditions of the Church. These are based on what is known about the first communities of Christians and much has come to light since the time of Trent. Because they presuppose and privilege the idea that there is an 'original' way to worship, these additions were seen as conservative and in some ways oppositional to the organic development of the liturgy. The second strand included quite radical changes such as translating the liturgy from Latin to the vernacular in each country. This kind of change was seen as liberal and in tune with contemporary life in the 1960s. As Reid states: "modern man, Catholic or not, was increasingly becoming a private citizen in an even more secular world. The Liturgical Movement was well aware of this obstacle."[7] The church had clearly expressed reasons for looking both to the past and to the future while developing the liturgy.

This historical perspective on the development of the liturgy is relevant to this dissertation because every performance of the liturgy is in constant tension between trying to be faithful to the past and fully present at each new performance. My emphasis on the historical is not to try to ground the liturgy in the past, but to show how recent developments have begun to take into account

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[5] Some changes happen at the local level of the church and to a certain extent the Roman Catholic Church allows for culturally specific modes of worship to happen within the overarching framework of the prescribed liturgy.
[6] James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*, (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 1.
[7] Reid, p. 285.

the performative nature of liturgical action. Paul Connerton has written extensively on rituals and commemorations. Here he identifies a problem with focussing too much on the history of a ritual:

> The Passover and the Last Supper have for long been remembered without there being any living generation who can [...] remember their originating historical context. The one-sidedness of the approach which insists upon the invention of traditions results from an inability to see the performativity of ritual. The effect is to obscure the distinction between the question of the invention of rituals and the question of their persistence. The historicists demand that we fully review the intentions of the *creators* of a ritual, a demand which in some cases is not only not sufficient but is often not even a necessary condition for understanding ritual. For I would argue that that notion of 'reading' a ritual is here being taken too literally; as a result, the identifying and partially constitutive features of ritual – such as formality and performativity – tend to be largely ignored in the attempt to approximate as closely as possible the interpretation of ritual to that of, say, a literary political tract.[8]

Connerton's point, that the persistence of a ritual is the more interesting element when it comes to analysis, is at the heart of performative approaches. While the 'organic development' mentioned earlier and the extensive research undertaken as part of Vatican II do try to maintain a clear connection with the past, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the focus on participation in the Roman Catholic liturgy has started to shift in ways commensurate with performative action.[9]

At the end of Vatican II changes established by the Council were sent out to all Roman Catholic congregations. These were not all adopted at once, as some

[8] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 103-4.

[9] The question of whether an original performance exists is straightforward in the case of the Roman Catholic liturgy. The liturgy is built around the Eucharist and the celebration of the Eucharist was instantiated by Jesus. However, Jesus was actually using a pre-existent form, that of the Passover meal (which in and of itself holds significance for both the Jewish and Christian traditions). So although his use of the objects was 'new' the entire form was not. Also, while the use of bread and wine to 'remember' Jesus was instigated by him, the subsequent performances of this event were quite different from his version, mostly because he was no longer physically present. Added to this are the continual changes in form and content of the entire Eucharistic celebration that has taken place over 2000 years. No contemporary performance of the liturgy can claim to re-produce or re-perform exactly what Jesus did, nor what his followers did in the first occurrences of what has become the liturgy.

of the changes involved architectural adaptations as well as shifts in dress, music, the words of the liturgy, etc. Among the vast number of changes put in place by Vatican II, the congregation was thrust into the role of participant by the use of the vernacular, new architectural ideas[10] and the way the Mass was celebrated.[11] The congregation, now able to fully listen, hear and understand what was being said because of the change in language, were engaged in more of the active performance through call and response, recitation and singing. The new liturgy altered the kind of participation that was needed to perform the liturgy.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, the reform brought in by Vatican II was concerned with the participation of the congregation. Participating in any of the individual parts of the liturgy can be performative; the speaking of texts, singing of songs and corporeality of kneeling and praying 'perform' the written liturgy. As Connerton explains, it is through the enactment of the liturgy with embodied actions that the liturgy occurs:

> We can [say] that liturgical language is a certain form of action and puts something into practice. It is not a verbal commentary on an action external to itself; in and of itself liturgical language is an action."[12]

The liturgy is thus 'constructed' or essentially 'performed' each time by the people present in a completely unique fashion. From the priest through to the youngest member of the congregation the liturgy is a unique performance of embodied actions because its completion is dependent on and enacted with the 'other,' both the other of God and the other of the fellow participant. This engagement with the other is a specific way of being present, of participating, of

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[10] As already mentioned in Chapter 2, for a detailed examination of the impact of architecture post Vatican II see Steven J. Schloeder *Architecture* in *Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture*.

[11] Other Christian denominations have also undergone significant changes in liturgical practice since the 60s, however the same defined moment in time offered by the Vatican II Council does not exist in Protestant or Orthodox Churches.

[12] Connerton, p. 57.

doing the work, alongside the obvious work of the body, mind and soul to kneel, stand, sit, eat, sing, listen, speak, pray, think, focus, forgive, trust and believe.[13]

The contribution of each participant to the work of an embodied performance is necessary for a successful Mass. One of the ways the individual contributes is through their unique enactment of each section. As White explains, after Vatican II people came to a new understanding of their role: “People were beginning to grasp the difference between praying *at* Mass and praying *the* Mass itself.”[14] When the participants understand themselves as integral to “praying the Mass” they consciously undertake the performance. If they consistently engage with this process from one week to the next, the range of meanings available to them increases. Embodied, performative participation and the production and assimilation of meanings are reliant on each other. From its beginnings the liturgy has been formed, challenged, embraced and developed by those who *do* participate. The continued relevance of it as a way to perform belief is reliant on those same people.[15]

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[13] The nature of embodied performance means that it is impossible to assign actions solely to one part of the body, as the whole body is involved in singing, praying or listening, but this list demonstrates many types of work that are part of the liturgy.

[14] White, p. 114. [My emphasis.]

[15] For those who believe in the teachings of the church, performing the liturgy on a Sunday morning is not simply the performance of the text by a group of people. For the Christian there is one other aspect of the performance which is important to the liturgy as a whole – the eternal liturgy. The eternal liturgy, which is part of church doctrine, is understood to be performed all the time in heaven – a constant celebration of God by his creation. (The eternal liturgy is a concept that is part of accepted Roman Catholic doctrine. The Sacrosanctum Concilium states: “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle; we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican Council, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_ 19631204_sacrosanctum -concilium_en.html> [accessed 16 April 2009] Chapter 1 Section 8). The implications of this for believers are manifold: when the congregation performs the liturgy they are joining with all people (those living, dead and those not yet born) in praising God. Reminders of this are built into the service itself and the Sanctus is the main instance of this. The Sanctus (which is normally sung by the participants) is part of the text that precedes the Consecration. Depending on the church and which version of the liturgy they are using, the text

The work of the liturgy is constantly being performed, whether in a church service or in heaven. Anscar Chupungco explains the nature of the relationships the performance of the liturgy instigates: "The liturgy can be defined also from the angle of encounter between the faithful and God. This implies that through the Church's worship the faithful both as a body and as individual members enter into the presence of the triune God."[16] The meanings understood by those who participate each week are thus multi-layered as meaning is found through the participation of the entire person. It is the physical and material aspects of meaning production that are the focus of the next section.

**Meaning Through Action**

Meaning, and the attempt to define it, has fuelled research in many disciplines. Especially in theology the 'meaning' as perceived and understood by the

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immediately before the Sanctus ends with words similar to "we join with the angels…" (For more on the Sanctus see www.newadvent.org/cathen/13432a.htm [accessed 18 May 2009]). The participants then sing the Sanctus, the text of which is taken from the book of Revelation and effectively links the eternal and earthly liturgies. Singing 'with the angels' reminds the participants that the eternal liturgy is continuous while their involvement is partial. God is participating with the congregation in the entire liturgy through the Holy Spirit. Christians understand God to be three parts, God the Father (the God of the Hebrew Scriptures), God the son (Jesus who died on the cross) and God the Holy Spirit (the spirit of God who dwells in each believer). This tripartite understanding of God is complex and constantly debated by Christians. How it works is not clear; it is accepted as a divine mystery. This is how Christians believe God has chosen to explain his identity to humans. What is important in relation to liturgy is simply that all three aspects of who God says he is are present in the performance of the liturgy. The Trinitarian understanding of God as being three parts, distinct parts that are nonetheless only one God, is one of the mysteries of faith. For a short, but helpful book on this topic see Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles Creed* (London: SCM, 1992). The Holy Spirit is believed to be present in every church, with the congregations and, whether it is felt or not, contributes to the enactment of the liturgy each time.

[16] Anscar J. Chupungco, 'A Definition of Liturgy', in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Introduction to the Liturgy*, Vol. I (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 3-10 (p. 6). In the eternal liturgy Jesus is the offering/sacrifice made on an eternal scale, i.e., this one offering is enough for all people who have lived, are living and will live. The earthly liturgy, then, is understood as a material manifestation of what is happening eternally; the sacrifice of Jesus is re-performed by those who believe – each time – not simply as a re-presentation, but as a reiteration, i.e., Jesus is the continual offering and this offering is 'produced' at every performance (it is important to make clear that Jesus is not re-sacrificed during the Mass). While the eternal liturgy is not the immediate focus of my analysis of the materiality of the Roman Catholic Liturgy, it is a factor for those who practice and believe.

practitioner is highly contested.[17] The individual elements in the church liturgy do have meanings. An accepted meaning behind any one aspect of the liturgy can be predetermined (such as saying the Lord's prayer), but the individual experience differs from person to person, or from one enactment to another.

The belief that comes with the understanding of meaning is vital for the liturgy to be effective. People rarely believe in something in which they find no meaning. But personal experiences with belief are difficult to assess. It is possible, however, to investigate ways of approaching and engaging with the performance of belief. The various aspects that impact upon the performance of the liturgy include the metaphorical (the liturgical text affirms that the participants together make up the 'body of Christ'), physical and material (the liturgy cannot be performed by one person and demands the presence of participants and objects), and spiritual (the relationship between the participants and God is the reason for the performance to take place). The participant has a relationship to objects and the form of the liturgy.

The following scenario is one example of how two people can find very different meanings in an experience of the liturgy. During a first experience of a Mass understanding the realm of spiritual relationships and the performance of belief may be too much to take in. For someone walking into a Mass who had never attended before, the experience would be, at most, one of responding because some form of sense would first have to be made of the events unfolding in the space. Responding is active and the first response to an event affects all subsequent responses. Without the ability to understand the liturgy it is difficult to participate and thus engage with the intended performance. This performance

[17] For more on this debate see Martin Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999) and Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

situation is thus somewhat reliant on participants having either an understanding of the language or a pre-existing understanding of the form. It therefore seems as if an educated participant is necessary, but I suggest that this is not always the case. As an example consider two first time participants in a Roman Catholic Mass. One speaks the language and belongs to another Christian denomination, the other does not speak the language, has never been in a church and does not know the story of Jesus. While an initial conclusion could be that the person who 'understands' Christian worship will 'engage' or 'enjoy' the service more, this is not the only outcome. The person with a Christian background has preconceived ideas about what is appropriate to do in a church.

- The formal style might not correspond to anything that they consider worship.
- Eating the bread and drinking the wine might be something they normally do four times a year, not every week.
- Not being able to fully participate in the call/response sections could be alienating.

While this person has some knowledge of the form and the language the differences between the two styles have the ability to frustrate as much as the similarities have the ability to aid identification.

For the person who knows nothing and anticipates nothing (and decides to engage with the event) the experience is one of being in response. By 'in response' I mean that as everything is new, the only way to engage is to respond to the embodied experiences of seeing, hearing, tasting and touching. The Roman Catholic liturgy engages all the senses and a person who 'understood' nothing about the form or language would still be able to gain a rich embodied understanding through active participation. Fully participating would take effort, but is possible. While similar arguments exist for the second person as for the first, i.e., the style of liturgy might not correspond to anything they consider

worship, it is just as likely for the second person to engage more with the performance.

The performance situation calls on those present to use the body in behaviour learned through imitation and repetition. The forms can simply be copied until a memory is created in the body. The participant must be convinced by the religious tradition enough to bother attempting to learn both the performance form and the relevance behind the form. Otherwise the participation in the form will remain pretence – the ability to worship is learned. Learning a form before being able to worship does not mean that a person cannot believe before they worship. But the performance of the belief with the social group of believers is precluded when the form is not known.

Christians understand the need to worship God through the instructions in the Bible, both those from the Old Testament that explain how to both build and worship in the Temple, and those from the New Testament that encourage members to meet and instruct one another.[18] Worship during the liturgy is not undertaken alone, and is always participatory. The idea of a static performance situation is perhaps difficult to imagine as the people and places which perform the liturgy are diverse and constantly changing. Individual elements of the Mass are static: readings from the Bible, inclusion of songs/hymns, the Lord's prayer, the Creeds, the celebration of the Eucharist. However, the style of music, tone of voice, and linking sections can vary significantly from church to church and culture to culture. From the architecture, to the decorative stoles, to the manner of sharing the peace,[19] each group is able to specify some aspects of how it wants to

[18] This is a short list of examples of passages in the Bible that discuss the building of the temple and how to worship: 1 Kings 6-8; 2 Chronicles 2-6; Psalm 24, 35, 48, 66, 95, 96; Luke 4:8; Hebrews 9; 10:25; and Romans 12:1.
[19] Sharing the peace is a part of the service where people generally shake hands and say "Peace be

perform the liturgy. It is through years of performing together that the group establishes this defined performance situation which includes where, when, what and how they perform.

The case study that follows looks at three examples of performances of the liturgy. Each description focuses on the physicality and materiality of the embodied performance of the participants and is an attempt to avoid an analysis that relies on representation and metaphysical meaning in order to engage with the performance.

### MEANING IN THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is the centre point of the traditional Christian liturgy and the orthodox understanding is that God is present[20] in the elements of bread and wine. Although the manner of God's presence is variously, even contentiously, articulate, I introduce examples from writers who treat this complex topic well and with great clarity. The range of meanings in liturgical action exceed the scope of this dissertation with its focus on embodied action, nevertheless, this introduction to some of the major discussions about meaning will prove helpful in the later case study on the Roman Catholic liturgy.

One of the best known writers on the liturgy in the last century was an Anglican monk – Dom Gregory Dix.[21] His major work *The Shape of the Liturgy* emphasized the structure of the performance as intrinsic to meaning-making. He argued that content alone did not convey the scale and scope of meanings, and

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with you" or some variation on this idea. In some churches people turn to those in their immediate vicinity while in others people leave their pews, greet each other with a hug and engage in discussion.

[20] This kind of presence is different to the general sense that God in the form of the Holy Spirit is received by people when they believe. And also that Christ is understood to be present where two or three people (or more) are gathered together in his name.

[21] Dom is a title and Dix was a monk in the Benedictine Order.

that the form in which this content was delivered was equally important. While the book delves into history in intricate detail, Dix begins with the earliest texts available to us which discuss the meanings of the Eucharist – Christian Scripture. Dix lists the "rich variety of meanings" which were mentioned in the New Testament in relation to the ritual of the bread and wine.[22] These include:

- the solemn proclamation of the Lord's death
- the familiar intercourse of Jesus abiding in the soul, as a friend
- the 'true' and the 'secret' manna
- the meaning of all sacrifice
- the truth of all Passovers
- it looks forward to the future beyond the end of time
- the anticipation of the final judgment of God
- a foretaste of the eternal Messianic banquet of heaven
- a tasting of the powers of the world to come
- it foreshadows the exultant welcome of His own at that Second Coming.[23]

From a form of remembrance to the understanding of sacrifice to the anticipation of an ultimate meeting with God, the New Testament references span a huge range of associations. This list is not exhaustive, however, and Dix mentions a few more which are more directly related to the person of Jesus as he is understood in the elements of bread and wine:

> By the time the New Testament came to be written the Eucharist already illuminated everything concerning Jesus for His disciples—His Person, His Messianic office, His miracles, His death and the redemption that He brought. It was the vehicle of the gift of His Spirit, the means of eternal life, the cause of the unity of His church.[24]

These combined meanings focus specifically on the bread and wine, in relation to the person of Jesus, and more pan-biblically in relation to Jewish and Christian rituals and expectations, e.g. Passover and a final judgement. It is striking that the meanings found early in the New Testament are so numerous and is therefore obvious, with so much scope for disagreement, why there has been such sustained

[22] Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983 [1945]), pp. 4-5.
[23] Dix, p. 5.
[24] Dix, p. 5.

discussion over the centuries. The plethora of associations and meanings has been fruitful ground for theology. Even with all of these inherent meanings there are still more discover as we will see later. However, a closer look at a few examples will provide a better understanding of how meaning functions as it changes in relation to the bread and wine.

An example that highlights why there is so much room for various interpretations and associations of meaning is offered by Alasdair I.C. Heron. In a discussion of Betz's analysis of the four Gospel narratives Heron focuses on a shift that happens internally to the Gospels themselves from the person of Jesus to the ideas of his flesh and blood:

> The four narratives fall into two pairs, Paul and Luke's longer version, and Mark and Matthew. The first pair are generally closer to the oldest Greek account of Jesus' original words and actions, and so enable its provisional reconstruction. In it, Jesus describes himself in terms drawn from the Servant passages in Isaiah, and attention is concentrated upon his person and the covenant in him. In the later narratives, his flesh and blood and sacrificial death come increasingly to the fore. In this way, the centre of gravity shifts under the impact both of theological reflection upon the meaning of his death and of controversy concerning the meaning of the Eucharist itself.[25]

Here the four writers present not only slightly different versions, but the changes that occur from one text to the other are affected, so argue Betz and Heron, over time. Because the writers (and other members of the early community) had had time to reflect on the events, their understandings of these events had shifted. This is not presented as a problem to be solved, but as the natural outcome of a process of experience. This pattern of multiple and adapting meanings continues through history, beginning with those closest to Jesus and the original ritual. Heron continues with insight into the danger of a limited focus:

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[25] Alasdair I.C. Heron, *Table and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 15. [Note: Heron is discussing Paul's contribution to a narrative description and is not discussing the four Gospels.]

> In the West at least, both Roman Catholic and Protestant thinking have sometimes concentrated attention so exclusively on Jesus' death as to lose sight alike of his incarnation and human life, of his resurrection and ascension to be present for us at the right hand of the Father, and of his future coming.[26]

When the Eucharist is seen only, or focally, as death it loses the full range of its meanings. If understood as only a ritualistic remembrance of death, it's meaning is limited: "The meaning of the Eucharist has then been located solely in the cross, with the result that a choice has come to force itself between seeing the Eucharist as a 'repetition' of his sacrifice and understanding it as a 'mere remembering' of it."[27] The dynamic of participation is affected by the nature of the ritual action. If this is only a repetition or a remembrance then it commemorates but does not impact anyone. If Christ is not present then participants are not implicated in a meaningful way as there is therefore no encounter with God. Heron reminds the reader "that from the earliest recoverable tradition of the Last Supper it is indeed 'the whole Christ' who gives himself to us in the Eucharist as 'the new covenant' made by God."[28]

A further example discussed by Heron is that of the bread and its role in constituting the community, which is a key meaning for contemporary Christians. Those present are valued for their contribution to the performance of the liturgy – they are important in its execution and they constitute the body of Christ in the world. Heron reiterates the standard meanings: "In Christian thought the breaking of the bread has of course been generally regarded as a representation of the death of Jesus; and the symbolism does obviously suggest itself."[29] The bread breaks in the Eucharist as a clear reminder that the body of Christ was broken through

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[26] Heron, p. 16.
[27] Heron, p. 16.
[28] Heron, p. 16.
[29] Heron, p. 25.

beatings and crucifixion. However, the point is not the death, but what that death effected in the world for people and more broadly the relation brought about between people and God: "the main point of the whole action was the blessing of God and the receiving and eating of the bread as a gift from him. Its breaking was a necessary but incidental element in the pattern."[30] The meaning of the death thus encompasses a death which is in turn treated symbolically through the use of bread and wine, which in turn become a means through which God's grace and blessing are received by believers. This extra layer of meaning takes the performance of the ritual from mere repetition to an event with meanings that implicate the participant in a relationship with God; one where the participant receives from God.

This is not the end of the layers of meaning as the participants themselves also play a role – how and what they receive, both from God and from the event are all important considerations, as Heron explains:

> The pattern as a whole, however, reveals a striking and rather different connexion with Jesus' words. For there is a marked parallel between the whole action of the grace and what Jesus says about the bread. In the grace it is given to be eaten as a gift from God; and Jesus identifies it as his own person, whom God will give for many. The link thus seems to be not simply between the bread and Jesus himself: it is between *bread received and shared* and *Jesus given up by God for many*.[31]

Sharing and being 'given up' or sacrificed are also layered meanings, and ones which impact even the most mundane of activities – eating a meal. For early Christians coming out of the Hebrew traditions, to share a meal was to create a bond:

> The meal itself established a bond between those who shared in it: it did not merely symbolise the bond, but actually constituted it. Thus the bread used in the grace in the ordinary way of things in Jewish practice

[30] Heron, p. 25.
[31] Heron, p. 25.

> represented the blessing of God for the meal as a whole, the receiving of the whole as his gift, and the fellowship of those taking part.[32]

This understanding strengthens the idea of corporate action being of utmost importance. If sharing in the meal constitutes the bond then those who partake are bound to each other, having entered into relationship with each other as well as with God. This aspect is balanced with the significance of what is being eaten because this is the sacrifice of God who gave his son. The sacrificial meal of the Eucharist echoes the Passover taking on much more complex and cosmic meanings which have also been subject to reappraisals by subsequent generations of theologians.[33]

Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx wrote in *The Eucharist* about how we should understand these changing interpretations of Eucharistic meaning. As part of an analysis of the Tridentine dogma of transubstantiation he asserted that,

> an analysis of this kind should not be viewed in isolation. In this analysis, not only should we take into account the celebration of the Eucharist by the primitive Christian community and its reflection on it, as given to us in various stages in the Bible—we should also keep constantly in mind how the Church continued to celebrate and think about the Eucharist.[34]

As previously mentioned by Dix, there are many meanings associated with the Eucharist in the New Testament and Schillebeeckx asserts their relevance in tandem with how the Church embodies the rite throughout history. His point is that the nature of evolving rituals, as mentioned earlier in relation to the organic development of the liturgy, involves successive generations using the ritual in their own way, while staying true to doctrine.

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[32] Heron, p. 25.
[33] There is some disagreement as to whether the first Eucharist as celebrated by Jesus before he died was in fact the day of Passover or the day before. Current arguments place it as the Passover itself and account for the Gospel of John's alternate timeline through other means.
[34] Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 89.

In *The Eucharist* Schillebeeckx explained that as he was unable to treat the entire context and development of the Eucharistic rite he had therefore chosen to focus on the aspect he felt was "fundamental," namely, "a specific analysis of Christ's presence."[35] For Schillebeeckx, in this instance, the most important contributor to meaning is the presence of God in the Eucharistic act and he explains it thus: "There is in the Eucharist, as distinct from the other sacraments[36], a specific earthly real presence of the Christ who is nonetheless heavenly and remains heavenly in the sacrament."[37] By earthly presence he is referring to "a *sacramental* earthly presence, due to Christ's real act of making himself present *in* the gift of the holy bread."[38] This concept of a sacrament is one of the most discussed issues in theology and is key element to the development of meaning in all of the Christian denominations over the years.[39]

Schillebeeckx uses the Tridentine dogma as the basis for his discussion of "the true reality in the Eucharist" which "is no longer bread, but simply the body

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[35] "I have therefore concentrated my attention on only one aspect of the Eucharist, which I regard as fundamental. The path we follow here may not be considered as the model of a theological approach. The hermeneutical question about the real nature both of the biblical way of speaking about the Eucharist and of the way in which the magisterium of the Church speaks about must, of course, in any case be asked" (p. 89).

[36] The following is a definition of sacrament according the usage in the Christian tradition. The Roman Catholic Church endorses the seven sacraments: "The English use before the Reformation adopts the enumeration of seven sacraments (believed to have been first formulated by Peter Lombard in the 12th c.; the same list is recognized in the Eastern Church): viz., Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, Matrimony. …while the seven sacraments were viewed as eminently entitled to the name, it could be applied in a more general sense to certain other rites. From the 16th c., Protestants generally have recognized two sacraments only, viz. baptism and the Lord's Supper. The formal definition of *sacrament* depends on the answer to the question what is the distinctive feature common to the seven or to the two 'sacraments', on account of which they form a separate class from all other observances. Those who accept the number seven, and many of those who admit only two sacraments, say that the sacraments differ from other rites in being channels by which supernatural grace is imparted." 'sacrament, n.', *OED Online*, (March 2011), Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/view/Entry/169523?rskey=9tXZTR&result=1&isAdvanced=false> [Accessed 21 April 2011].

[37] Schillebeeckx, p. 85.

[38] Schillebeeckx, p. 89.

[39] Disagreement over if there are sacraments and what constitutes a sacrament has been a distinguishing feature of various Christian denominations.

and blood of Christ in a sacramental form."[40] As one of the seven sacraments, the Eucharist is not simply another Christian ritual. These are the only rites which are understood to be have been ordained by God and through which God's grace is given to his people. As such the Eucharist shares in these meanings – however, these are far from stable. Schillebeeckx reiterates that current analyses must and do take a modern perspective on the meanings of the Eucharist:

> Apart from this modern approach we, as believers, should never be able to seize the full implications for us of our Catholic faith. After all, we simply cannot formulate our belief as Christians did in the Middle Ages, or even as the apostles did; yet it is the same faith which we possess and experience—exactly the same faith, but with the dynamic identity of a living faith which is caught up in the movement of history.[41]

He asserts continuity of faith throughout history and allows for the shifting needs and circumstances to shape the precise meanings for different generations:

> the contemporary context of our life leads us to reinterpret the world of ideas with which the dogma of transubstantiation has come down to us, precisely in order to be able to preserve in a pure form the basic meaning of the dogma and to make it capable of being freshly experienced by modern man.[42]

This essentialist view of dogma allows for the same core idea to shape belief even as cultural developments in science, changes in language usage, and new theological understandings come to the fore. Meaning in relation to the Eucharist is thus stable and also able to respond to changes in culture over time.[43]

Thus far we have examined meanings from early Christian writers and the New Testament texts through to the Council of Trent and how faith and meanings

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[40] Schillebeeckx, p. 89.
[41] Schillebeeckx, pp. 85-86.
[42] "It is difficult to see how simply repeating the dogma word for word in our present age could do anything but impose an unnecessary and unjustified burden on our Christian faith" (p. 90).
[43] Heron provides clear examples of the kinds of understandings that have changed in various time periods simply based on cultural norms and understandings of science. For more see pages 80-107 on medieval Eucharistic theology. Schillebeeckx also provides examples throughout his text, specifically pages 53-75 where he discusses the tradition in the church over time. For example: "The early Christian vision was much more dynamic – corporeal things were, for the earliest Fathers of the Church, what they were because they were controlled by Powers, and a change of a thing meant that other Powers seized it and took possession of it. They said therefore that a Christian was a person whose flesh had been seized by the Pneuma, by God" (p. 67).

have been maintained over the centuries even as understandings have shifted. This has touched on practice, but only lightly. At the very beginning of his book Dix asserts: "This understanding of the rite, as essentially a corporate action, is clearly expressed in the very first christian description of the way in which it was performed."[44] As this dissertation is itself arguing for the relevance of performative action I agree with Dix's statement. However, in "Calvin and Barth on the Lord's Supper", Trevor A. Hart reminds us that it is important not to analyse the work of the liturgy and then extrapolate all meaning from such an analysis:

> The meaning of the Eucharist…whatever theological view of it is entertained, could never be *ex opere operato* in the strictest of senses. […] in numerous ways Eucharistic theology necessarily affirms that God's presence and activity are basic to the meaning of the rite."[45]

Meaning comes through the execution of the work in which God is present, but as previously mentioned, it is the way in which God's presence is understood to manifest which informs the meaning. As Hart explains, even across denominations there is a consensus that the Eucharist "involves a special, and not just a general, presence and action of God, and that this special presence and action is in some way focused upon the physical elements of bread and wine, and what is done with these – taking, breaking, eating, drinking, and so on."[46] The elements plus the actions, plus the presence of God together converge to effect meaning. Liturgical action points towards the need for active participation in the moment of accepting and eating the Eucharist to fully receive the special presence of God.

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[44] Dix, p. 1.
[45] Trevor A. Hart, 'Calvin and Barth on the Lord's Supper,' in *Calvin, Barth and Reformed Theology*, ed. by N. B. MacDonald and C. Trueman (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008), 29-56, p. 31.
[46] Hart, 'Calvin', p. 32

The participation of the congregation is a topic that has been treated by theologians of many denominations. We have already heard from an Anglican and a Roman Catholic, and now from John Calvin as well, that the "importance of human activity in the ceremony" is set "within the context of a logically prior divine action which under-girds ours and makes it meaningful." [47] The actions of the people are held within a framework set up by and contributed to by God. Calvin also mentions that topic which is also of such concern in speech acts – intention or, in relation to belief – faith. While it is impossible to monitor the intention of those present, one would hope that regular participants in the liturgy have faith and do believe in what they are doing. Hart explains that for Calvin there is something at stake in participation without faith:

> only those who eat and drink in faith truly receive what is offered to them. While the offer is indiscriminate and the table open, unbelief stops short at the level of a merely physical participation, the bread and wine being for it 'cold and empty figures'…devoid of that divine signification which, for faith, renders sharing in them an actual sharing in the body and blood of Christ. [48]

For the person who does not have faith partaking in the rite is the straightforward receiving of bread and wine, but not the divine aspects. Meaning is truncated not because of what it can contain, but because of limits put in place by others.

While maintaining this focus on the bread and wine, and their appropriate use and meaning, Calvin does not lose sight of the entire liturgy. Hart explains Calvin's position: "we should note the importance which he ascribes to the event of *the Supper as a whole* (and not just the bread and wine) in this regard."[49] Calvin returns to an emphasis on the overarching action of the liturgy to frame

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[47] Hart, 'Calvin', p. 34
[48] Hart, 'Calvin', p. 40.
[49] Hart, 'Calvin', p. 41. "Eucharistic theology has always insisted that it is the bread and wine *as they are set apart, taken, broken, poured out, received and consumed* which are the focus of what God does here" (Hart, p. 39). [Original emphasis.]

the parts and put them in context: "the ceremony is…a synthesis in which objects, actions and words are juxtaposed and related to one another. So, while Calvin insists that the material signs are vital, he also refuses to detach their meaning from the accompanying immaterial symbolics of narrative."[50] The importance of sharing the event with others was also mentioned by Schillebeeckx who emphasized that we should not forget how the early church celebrated the meal itself, and by Heron who reiterated that a bond is created between participants.

As with Hart's warning that the actions themselves not become the focus for meaning-making, Heron also distinguishes between two potential models of "a sacrament":

> One is controlled by the thought of God *acting through the action of the church*, the other by that of *God communicating by his Word to faith*. Yet each model has its strengths and its inherent dangers. The first is based on the sound recognition that a sacrament involves *action* and not merely *words*: 'Do this …' is performative and not merely declaratory. The second builds upon the equally fundamental awareness that God does not act upon us dumbly or impersonally, but in acting also communicates and evokes an answer. To this extent the two models may be seen as complementary and mutually corrective. Taken on its own, the first can lead to an uncritical identification of God's action and ours, and so to a magical view of sacramental efficacy, and the second to a reduction of 'sacrament' to a 'naked and bare sign', or to an activity of our own in which God is no longer believed to be involved directly. Yet the Word and the action of God cannot be sundered from each other; our own speech and action rest and depend on his; and both the activity of the church and the response of faith have their necessary place in the horizon. Each of the two models has something necessary and valuable to contribute – provided they are held together in proper complementarity rather than torn apart into stark opposition, in which each becomes opaque and absolute, with its more dubious aspects setting the tone.[51]

The two models show that there are not only different ways to understand God's presence in the liturgy, but there are indeed at least two larger complementary ways in which God's action is accomplished. However, neither should overtake

[50] Hart, 'Calvin', p. 41.
[51] Heron, p. 155. [Original emphasis.]

the other in theological discussions as the best or most efficient model, as both are necessary for a robust rite.

In this section I have introduced discussions of meaning from theologians across denominations. Their work on the Eucharist provides background to the various debates and ideas that have engaged Christians since the days of the early church. There is a marked difference between this section and the rest of the dissertation. In the other chapters I do not discuss how or whether God is actually present in the rituals and performances that form my case studies. My contribution to the fields of theology and performance studies is strictly focused on discussions of the performative and how the performances function from an embodied standpoint. I did not undertake interviews to ascertain what individual participants experience in relation to God's presence and I will not make assumptions. The academic hole that I am filling is concerned with where these two fields meet up in terms of the study of performative action in relation to performance and belief.

I want to conclude this section with Rowan Williams' book *On Christian Theology*. In it, Williams discusses the intricacies of understanding sign-making throughout history and in relation to contemporary practices of belief. He shows this to be complex, necessitating and utilizing a philosophical framework to order the signs used by a culture:

> The difficulty…is to hold on to the conviction that sign-making is a material and historical practice, without making it seem like an arbitrary imposing of form on passive stuff 'out there'; and to counter this we need, of course, the kind of philosophical framework which reminds us that the world is never neutral and passive in a simple sense, but already, primitively, known and thought in signs (in language and meaningful action). Symbolic forms are not just lying around, nor are they thought up as arbitrary glosses on straightforward experience of the world; they are what we live through as humans – as being capable of recalling and re-

> moulding what is given us, taking it forward and so re-moulding ourselves, the horizons of our understanding and our hope.[52]

In Williams' explanation signs and symbolic forms are intentional tools used by humans to make sense of experience, and how that experience is thought, as well as integrated into a culture. And the signs used by a culture are specific to that culture's needs. Seen in this light, the symbols of the Eucharist, and indeed the entire liturgy, have larger meaning applicable outside of the practices of the Church itself. This echoes Pouillon's argument about the language of belief being specific to the needs of Western culture and the rituals and philosophies that are at its foundation. The Eucharist contains some of the founding symbols of Western culture and their usage has been and continues to be pervasive.[53]

Williams clarifies overarching ideas and then moves into a more specific application in relation to the Eucharist. The Church uses the signs of the Eucharist not only to make meaning – as all humans do with signs, regardless of their provenance – but also because they are understood as enabling the presence of God in the event. There is a special nature to what "the Church signifies in doing these things – the new covenant and new creation in the life, death and raising of Jesus. In these acts the Church 'makes sense' of itself, as other groups may do, and as individuals do; but its 'sense' is seen as dependent on the creative act of God in Christ."[54] The difference in meaning-making in the Eucharist is this extra presence and action and Williams returns to the importance of action throughout. As with the other writers, Williams too explains the role of the sacraments, and he makes a case for action in particular: "the primary concern should be for sacramental actions rather than an attempt to focus on 'sacralized'

[52] Rowan Williams, 'The Nature of a Sacrament', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 197-208, p. 201.
[53] I will return to this idea in Chapter 4.
[54] Williams, p. 205.

objects."[55] This puts the focus on the context in which objects are used and the form the actions take in relation to the objects. The objects are themselves man-made and Williams warns against too much weight being placed solely on the material. Again, as with the others, Williams advocates a balanced understanding and performance of the Eucharist within the liturgical action.

In the end, Williams links the reasons a sign is used in the Eucharist back to the same reasons used by all humans: "All sign-making is the action of hope, the hope that this world may become other and that its experienced fragmentariness can be worked into sense."[56] This is true of human behaviour but there is a difference that is present when the use of the symbols is connected to belief. Williams describes how this works for a Christian: "The sacramental action of the believer is, at one level, a working into sense like any other; the difference is that this 'working' is done to open us to the sense already made by God as creator and redeemer."[57] There is an underlying belief held by Christians that God is trying to impart other knowledge. As we now move on to look at instances from three services over Easter week it will be useful to keep these concepts of meaning-making in mind.

### PERFORMING EASTER

From very theoretical ideas about how theology functions, the focus now shifts to a case study heavy in description. All the examples in this chapter are from church services in Olomouc and Radešinska Svratka in Moravia in the Czech Republic in 2005. I attended Roman Catholic services on Wednesday in the

[55] Williams, p. 206.
[56] Williams, p. 207.
[57] Williams, p. 207.

Cathedral in Olomouc, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in a Dominican Monastery church in Olomouc, and Saturday, Sunday and Monday in the village church in Radešinska Svratka. The explanations and examples provided in Appendix A may be useful as a point of reference while reading this section.

### Easter Monday

*St. Václav Kostel (St. Wenceslas Church)*
*Radešinska Svratka, Monday 28 March 2005*

Although the Easter Monday service is the last of those I attended, it is the most normal of all the services over Holy Week because it consists of the same liturgy that takes place each Sunday during the year. I explain it first to provide a point of comparison for the other performances of the liturgy. In the village of Radešinska Svratka this service took place at 7.30am and was well attended. Upon entering the church, participants were immediately implicated in rituals. Inside the church door were bowls with blessed water, hymn books and the wafers used for the Eucharist. All three elements were used by almost everyone who came through the door. People dipped their fingers into the water and then made the sign of the cross on their forehead or in front of their body. After using the blessed water, the next action was often choosing a hymn book and maybe picking up a book containing the order of service. The wafers were often the last object to be engaged with. It is common for the wafers that will be blessed for communion to be in a bowl at the back of the church so that each participant moves a wafer to a second bowl using a flat 'spoon.' In this way only the wafers in the second bowl (plus a small surplus) will be blessed during the Eucharist rite.

These rituals immediately place those present in a web of connections that emphasize personal choices and individual responses, as well as awareness of

collective action. As per Rancière's theories of spectatorship, the spectator selects and in this case the selection is of a book and a wafer. These might not seem like huge choices but the later use of the book and of the wafer are paramount in the service. The book is used for prayers and songs. After years of participation most people know the prayers by heart, but the songs change from week to week and the book enables fluid participation in the singing.

Selecting a wafer is more layered as the selection of a wafer is actually the selection of a unique wafer - one among many. Yet after the person makes that selection, perhaps with awareness, perhaps not, the wafer becomes one of many that are blessed and distributed. There is almost no chance that the person who selected that wafer will receive it during the service. In a sense, the selection of the wafer implicates the individual in the experience of another person at the Mass. Each wafer is meant for a person, that person's participation, and the importance of facilitating the experiences of all present.

The objects that were used, water, wafers and a book, all require an individual for the uses to be fulfilled. Yet these objects do not reflect back on the personalities or specific circumstances of any one person. One book or wafer is not more or less useful and the water is simply wet. These are task-based actions that start off a larger series of tasks that are done either one at a time or simultaneously throughout the liturgy. There is no punitive element to not completing these tasks at the door and there were no obvious abstentions to the participation in these actions. While the occasional person can slip in the back of the church and not engage with these objects, it would eventually draw the attention of others if people abstained altogether. These actions impact the overall completion of the Mass as enough wafers are necessary for everyone or the

Eucharist will be delayed and without books it is difficult for people to sing at the appropriate times. The "reality of the spectator's experience," to draw on McAuley, is primary in the liturgy and these opening actions reinforce the need for the participant to engage in the performance from beginning to end.

With these three rituals complete, the participants then proceed to the main aisle of the church where most people bow their head, or lower themselves to one knee, showing reverence to the altar. As they walk to a pew, some people greet others in hushed voices. When they reach the pew they want to sit in, they kneel again (while facing the altar) next to the pew. Upon sitting down many people immediately kneel and pray. These small rituals are carried out individually and are not formally prescribed (each person can choose how and what to perform). The result of these is a sense of constant, yet calm motion in the space. This motion feels preparatory and the more people join the space, participating in the small rituals, the more those present create the performance parameters for that particular day.

This section of the service involves observing others and oneself; selecting where to position the body geographically within the architectural space and in relation to other bodies; the comparison between this Mass and other instances; and the interpretation of the totality. As this service took place on Easter Monday, the potential exists to interpret this service through the previous four or five Easter services. This is the 'normal' weekly service, but it has just been preceded by services which are quite different. The possibility exists for those present to see the 'normal' aspects anew because of the opportunity for a close comparison of recent experiences. At the very least, the church space will have changed in appearance to the other Easter services because of the removal of

some objects (vestments and hangings) and addition of others (draping of crosses in black). The 'scopic drive' mentioned by McAuley is involved at every service and is busy during Easter because of many changes to normal routines.

Choosing to enter the building indicates intention, although whether that is to watch or to participate depends on the individual. Once inside the church the actions that are undertaken demarcate the space and prepare it for the communal performance. The actions build, one upon the other, e.g. the use of water and a sign (crossing oneself) change the person such that they become part of the space because they have performed for/in/with the space. Picking up a hymn book and moving a wafer might not receive much thought after years of repetition, but these actions attest to familiarity and belonging. Kneeling and bowing can be done with reverence and thought or automatically through familiarity; however they still contribute to the overall performance. Making the sign of the cross, kneeling and bowing, are physical engagements that signal participation in the performance and an understanding of the embodied demands of the belief.

The following analysis of the liturgy is presented in the order of the service itself and the titles of each section of the liturgy are placed before the analyses. The overarching action of the liturgy consists of a rising action to the climax of the Eucharistic rite and then a falling action to the end. The liturgy starts and ends with prayer and music. From the first communal prayers and call/response in the Introductory Rites through to the Readings a sense of communal performance is established. Speaking together as well as responding to cues links individuals to each other and to the performance. From time to time I mention the representational meanings that could be or are traditionally associated with various sections of the liturgy.

Introductory Rites – Hymn, Sign of the cross, Opening prayers, Greeting, Act of Penitence, Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis Deo, Silence, Collect

The opening of this service followed the prescribed order. These elements continue on from the actions undertaken at the door with water, wafers and books to engage the individual in the performance. Some actions foreground the individual (silent prayer and listening) and others address the group even while asking for individual action (singing, reflection, making the sign of the cross). This kind of training of those present in basic actions is an element of all ritual performances. No part of the liturgy is extraneous as each provides the tools necessary for participation at subsequent occasions.

Liturgy of the Word – Bible reading, Psalm, Alleluia, Gospel, Sermon/homily, Creed, Intercessions, Offering

The readings are a time of reflection and preparation for the sermon which is always short, five to ten minutes. The readings were done by members of the church, except the Gospel which is always done by the priest. The rhythm of this section leads into the Eucharist and involves the congregation more at each step. The participants listened to the readings and when the reader said the phrase 'This is the word of God (or the Lord)' they all responded 'Thanks be to God.'[58] The Psalm was introduced by the choir singing a single line which was then repeated by everyone after each verse. For the Gospel the participants stand and turn to face the Bible as it is carried into the centre of the aisle. They remain standing throughout the reading and afterward the response is sung in unison. The sermon was especially short at five minutes. The priest made eye contact with many people. Afterward the priest sat down and there was thirty to forty seconds of silence. The sermon is a time of mental focus and preparation and leads directly into prayers which are about the congregation, the church, the city, the country

[58] This was in Czech. By the end of the week I was able to identify these phrases both because of where they happen in the service as well as through the spoken rhythm.

and the world, generally in that order. Each section of Intercessory prayer ends with a call/response from the participants to the reader, such as: **Reader** – We pray. **All** – Lord hear our prayer. Everyone stands for the prayers and the Offering is taken up during a hymn. At this point in the service all the children came forward and the priest made the sign of the cross on each child's head in turn.

This is the section of the liturgy that requires the most sustained listening from those present. It is a time when the participant has time to reflect on the ideas in the Bible readings and those presented in the sermon. It is also a point where the play of looks is very much in evidence. Each part of this section is led by a different person or group (the choir often leads the Psalm) and the various facilitators look at the participants while they look back. As well, this is a prime section for the scopic drive to be "subverted or displaced" by what is happening in the church. It is naive to think that participants look without ceasing at the person who is speaking. The actions I noticed at this point included looking around the church at others, adjusting the position of the body on the pew, giving tissues to another person, calming babies who were making noises. There were also actions happening in the sanctuary where laypeople were preparing for what would come next, e.g. readying the Bible for each reading, checking candles, adjusting robes before walking. When the congregation turns to face the Bible during the Gospel reading everyone suddenly has a different view of the space as those in the front see people who came in after they did and those in the back see the faces instead of the backs of those seated ahead of them. There were a few faces that registered recognition of someone further back in the church. While the focus of that moment was the Bible reading, the gaze of each person registered

individual aspects only visible from that position. The 'reality of the spectator's experience' during the Gospel reading is played off the 'presentational reality' of the task-based performance the priest is doing during the reading. The breadth of the gaze that allows for unexpected eye contact with others as the person turns to face the Bible could disrupt the gaze of the individual spectator towards the Bible. Or it could be argued that the reality of the spectator's experience is an integral part of this section of the liturgy as participants listen to excerpts of text that are believed to relay the recorded actions and sayings of the head of the Church: Christ.

Liturgy of the Eucharist – Eucharistic Rite starts, Prayer, Call and response text, Sanctus, Consecration

From the Intercessory prayer into the Eucharist the action builds towards the climax of the blessing of elements and taking of Communion. It is in this section that the facilitators prepare the altar area and tell the story of Jesus breaking the bread and offering the wine. During the narrative of the Eucharist, incense is swung over the altar in a censer (also called a thurible), and bells are rung. The smell of the incense wafts slowly over the congregation so that depending on where you are sitting the smell could arrive minutes after the censer was swung. The bells that are rung during the Eucharistic Rite were originally used to call attention to the Eucharist when churches used Latin; the congregation stood during the service and there was no amplification system. The bells are rung during the blessing of the bread and wine. Each object is held up in turn so that all can see (a tradition that was started when people had trouble seeing to the front of the church as everyone stood throughout). In this service almost everyone was watching during this section.

The retelling of the Eucharist is the closest the liturgy comes to the presentation of 'dramatic fiction.' No one takes on a character role, but the priest does use the words of the Bible as a script - 'Take and eat in remembrance of me.' He also stands in for Christ by performing the actions of the breaking of the bread and the pouring of wine. These actions lead into the participants receiving the bread and, in some instances of the Mass, the wine. The dramatic fiction, presentational reality and social reality of the total event are all at play in this section and compete from moment to moment for the participants' attention. The 'fiction' or pretence is the least strong of the three, but is none the less at play as people are asked to place themselves imaginatively into the time and space of the Last Supper. The presentational reality is evident in the priest and lay people preparing the table for the blessing of the elements and the subsequent serving of food. Everyone in the church is preparing at this point for the most evident performance of the social reality of the total event - namely the taking of communion itself.

The Communion Rite – Lord's prayer, Peace, Agnus Dei, Call and Response, Taking of Communion, Prayer

The blessing of the Eucharistic meal is followed by the Lord's Prayer which maintains the same rhythm in Czech as in English such that it is possible to say it in time in the other language. In this church the sharing of the peace was relaxed as everyone knew the person next to them in this little village. There was much smiling, and some people hugged or touched cheeks, as well as shaking hands and saying 'Peace be with you.' After the sharing of the peace the participants kneel for the rest of the Eucharistic preparations. While this is the section of the service which has the most to see, hear and smell, some people prayed through the set text with their eyes closed. The set text is always followed immediately by

the short recitation of the confession. This short burst of group speech directed to God directly precedes the receiving of communion. The participant comes into contact with the physical and material realities of the Eucharistic action through their hands and mouth. The bread is given out from many points throughout the church. Participants lined up behind one of the people distributing the bread and received it on their tongue by opening their mouth.[59] After eating people make the sign of the cross in front of their body and return to their seats and generally pray silently. When all have eaten, the bread and wine (which is drunk by the priest) are cleared from the altar. Throughout this section there is much activity accomplished alongside people praying. This represents the most active moment of the service for the participants as a group. When the Eucharist is complete the energy and focus in the room change sharply and the atmosphere shifts back towards a more individual, reflective state compared to the previous energised state of the group.

The social reality of the total event comes to a high point during the taking of communion. As the name indicates, those present are meant to be in communion with God and with each other at this moment, yet each person interacts individually with the element of the Eucharist, i.e. the bread or wafer. Almost all the people at a Mass go forward to receive communion (those who do not are often visitors, children who have not yet gone through the confirmation rite or those who cannot walk to receive it – the bread is often brought to people unable to walk once everyone else has been served). The communal aspect of the event is emphasised through the almost complete participation. The event also

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[59] Although Jesus said to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him, in the Roman Catholic tradition wine is only drunk by all present a few times a year. Theologically this is accounted for by the idea that Jesus is no longer a 'divided' human entity, so the bread/body incorporates the body and the blood.

represents communion with all other Christians around the world who participate in the Mass. The social reality of the total event encompasses all people in the church sharing in the defining physical and material elements of the ritual. This extends to the reality of the choices those present have made to come to a church, to commit to the duration of the event, to be in communion with one another (in whatever form), and to return again. Yet, it is important not to rely on this idea of the communal as a way to explain participation. As already mentioned in relation to Rancière's ideas, it is the ability of each person to engage as an individual that offers a concrete avenue to move past representative analyses of spectators. The presumed passivity of the group cannot then be taken for granted or treated as a whole representing a certain kind of engagement. What can be analysed or assumed, is the unpredictable interplay or interaction created in the performance space.

Concluding Rite – Announcements, Blessing, Final Hymn

The priest made some announcements which, I was told, were about the services during the week. When this was finished he paused, his stance became more formal, and his arms, which were at his sides, were hanging so that his palms were open to the congregation. He then pronounced the blessing in a tone of voice different from that in which he gave the announcements. The Final Hymn was played on the organ, the participants all sang and the priest and ministrants recessed out of the sanctuary. When the hymn had finished people started reciting a text. This was the first time I had heard this text and it was explained to me that in this village the service always ends with a group recitation of a text which is not part of the official liturgy. It is quite long and takes at least ninety seconds to recite.

Those who believe in its efficacy and its meanings perform this service week after week. Many who do not understand all the details of theology or necessarily even know what they believe also participate. Some participation is based on tradition and habit, for others it informs the rest of their week and is a vital part of the rhythm of daily physical, material and spiritual life. The descriptions of the Monday service are a base line from which we can better understand the details of the other services, the demands on the body and the meanings created in the space.[60]

While I have tried to keep my descriptions free from broad claims as to the effects and affects of the Mass on an individual, I have from time to time claimed that participants would find a specific section important or meaningful. I do this as a participant-observer who is well versed in church participation myself. However, I would be remiss to not raise one of the objections of Rancière, McAuley and Freshwater, namely, "the belief that participation empowers has become a compelling orthodoxy in theatre and performance studies. And, like most orthodoxies, it often seems to be applied reductively and uncritically."[61] Liturgy is about belief and worshipping God is a large component of expressing this belief. Empowerment, as it is used in the above quotation, is linked with the political. The kind of empowerment that is often discussed in theology is that liturgy empowers through the grace of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the power of Christ. It is participation in the liturgy that brings the individual into contact with God in physical and material ways both through the

[60] I include textual references from the Bible in a few instances. While I did not understand any Bible reading that took place during the service, because I do not speak Czech, I was familiar with the Bible verses, which I have included, before I attended the services. These stories are well known and whether they were read out in full in Czech or simply referenced, the participants at these services would have known the relevance of the passages.
[61] Freshwater, p. 56.

Eucharist and through the 'body of Christ' who are the other participants. From the point of view of an outsider who does not believe in the Christian religion, this argument is subjective. However, there is another way to approach this issue of the reductive and uncritical analysis.

From a performance studies point of view the liturgy is by nature an ongoing performance practice which is performative and dependent on the visible and active participation of many people for its completion. With the history of the event reaching back close to fifteen hundred years (as the Council of Trent decided many of the forms still used today), it is hard to deny its efficacy. What these services accomplish is what Rancière defines as emancipation, i.e. "the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body."[62] In the liturgy both facilitators and participants look and act, and all are simultaneously individuals and members of a collective body who are present at a performance event. Rancière explains that in order for this emancipation to occur between all those in the space a third thing that belongs to no one is needed. In relation to the teacher and student this would be a text that neither has written that they can both read and then discuss. The two people are distanced from each other because of the difference in their knowledge, and both are distanced, according to Rancière, from the text to similar effect. In the liturgy the third element is the performance itself and it subsists between the people.[63]

The experience of the liturgy of both those who prepare and those who participate is the unique shared aspect to which they can refer afterwards. The text of the liturgy is available as a point of reference but it does not reflect the

[62] Rancière, p. 19.
[63] Rancière, p. 14.

unique details of the performance that is experienced at each Mass or service. The liturgical text can be read anytime while it is the performance itself that can only be examined or analysed afterward. The performance provides this opportunity to blur boundaries which are ultimately reaffirmed by the irreducible distances between each individual, but without which there would be no opportunity for interactions. The specific experience is only available to the individual, but the performance event is only possible through group participation. As the following examples show, those present at the Easter week services are involved in a complex performance where participants and facilitators act, and look, reciprocally in, and at, the performance itself.

## Maundy Thursday

*Majetek Konventu, Dominikánů v Olomouci*
*Olomouc, Thursday 24 March 2005*

As already mentioned, the liturgical performance of Easter is not limited to one day, but takes place over nine days – from Palm Sunday to Easter Monday.[64] Each liturgical enactment is slightly different over the nine days as each addresses aspects of the Christian story. Maundy Thursday is the main day of preparation for the weekend services. The church as well as the service are marked by changes for Easter. Some changes affect objects in the building, e.g. crosses are draped in cloth in preparation for the commemoration of Christ's death, and the organ and bells are only used at the beginning of the service (for the first hymn and procession, respectively) and are next used for the Saturday Night Vigil. (Hymns are still sung and wooden clickers are used instead of bells, as tradition says that the bells symbolically fly off to St. Peter's in Rome until the

[64] For a discussion of the impact of Easter beyond Holy Week see Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, (London: SCM Press, 1988).

Saturday Night Vigil.) The physical changes to the space are immediately visible and the lack of musical instruments stands out as a clear difference from the normal weekly routine. These services are special and many of the actions and objects are only performed or used once a year. The churches I visited for each service over Easter week were completely full of people to the point that more than once there was standing room only at the back.

**Foot Washing**

Changes to the service which affect the body include the washing of feet, i.e. either members of the clergy or members of the congregation have their feet washed at the front of the church in view of the rest of the participants. This is paired with a reading from the New Testament (John 13:1-17) in which Jesus washes the Disciples' feet and commands the Disciples to continue: "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."[65] (John 13:15). In this church it was the Dominican brothers whose feet were washed. Eight brothers sat on two wooden benches which were placed in front of the pews. They removed their socks and shoes. The Celebrant took a large silver bowl and knelt in front of the first man placing the bowl under the man's feet. Another man carried a pitcher of water and a cloth.  The Celebrant poured the water over the feet of the men and then dried them off with the cloth one at a time. Children came to the front to watch the washing and the first man to have his feet washed grimaced and smiled at the temperature of the water. The foot washing was not rushed and the pitcher of water was refilled after each washing. Members of the congregation took pictures of the washing and the choir sang.

[65] All Biblical quotations are taken from the New Jerusalem (NJB) version of the Bible.

In this example a well known story from the Bible was read and enacted. Many possible meanings can be read into or through the story: service, sacrifice, love for others, obedience to God, etc. However, the action also provides a clear moment of blurring between those who act and those who watch. The facilitators of the service, the priests and brothers, shift positions and take on participant roles. The foot washing was not a literal re-enactment. It did not seek to cast individuals in the roles of individual Disciples or as a stand in for Jesus (although a church could stage a dramatization of the event). The foot washing was a performance that reflected a belief in the value of the actions because the actions themselves are valuable; through the foot washing feet were washed. One person invested time and effort in others – washing a foot is a physical act that takes planning and intention. The actions may represent or bring to mind other meanings for the participants in the room, but they also simply and clearly show the performance, and performative action, of belief. This church chose to highlight the teaching of Jesus through the repetition of an act that had been done thousands of times before; its performative power achieved through ritualized repetition.

This also highlighted the presentational reality of the performance through task-based foot washing. The brothers who came forward to have their feet washed had been part of the group of facilitators. As they each sat down and took off their socks and shoes they became individuals with unique ways of moving and reacting to what was happening. The other facilitators became lookers as they watched these individuals engage in the actions. The congregation exhibited individual responses as they came forward to engage in actions such as taking pictures, some led children forward to watch which changed the nature of the

looking, some laughed at the reactions to the cold water on feet. Participants demonstrated their ability to create their own "unpredictable interplay."

It is not enough, however, to simply repeat an action in order to generate performative effects. Agency, in Butler's account of the performative, is dependent on resistance. Whereas, according to Mahmood's analysis of performative action, agency is found in the "specific logic of the discourse of piety" which is demonstrated through "relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices."[66] The Christian liturgical tradition is a discursive tradition of piety rich in words, concepts and practices. The embodied practices of Easter week allow for participants to have agency "in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms."[67] In the example of Maundy Thursday the participants have agency throughout the service as they negotiate their own participation. They fulfil performative norms from eating and drinking to praying and leading children forward to watch the washing of feet. In this situation the foot washing practice is taken to be authoritative by the church as an institution as well as its members because it is from a Biblical narrative. The church has repeated these actions in many circumstances over the last two thousand years. Each subsequent repetition is a citation of the previous actions and experiences of the actions of all those present.

The foot washing of Maundy Thursday is an example of the physical and material aspects of Christian tradition which place emphasis on performative behaviours which are self referential (i.e. the foot washing does not need to represent an ideal of foot washing. It refers to the act that takes place in the church itself). Any symbolic or representative meanings that are read onto the

[66] Mahmood, p. 180.
[67] Mahmood, p. 186.

event are secondary to the meanings of the event itself and belief functions in this example in various ways. Primarily there is a belief in the Bible as a text, as well as a belief in following the teachings and commands of Jesus, therefore there is a belief in using embodied practices to perform that which is believed. The command to follow the example Jesus set is related to the earlier explanation of speech acts. The command was not framed as an explicit performative ‘I command you,’ or ‘Do this,’ yet the use of language is in line with Searle’s categories, as discussed in Chapter 1, of Directives and Declarations.[68] The original material act combined with the speech act is the impetus for the performance in the church.

The social reality of the total event comes to the fore during the foot washing. Besides the fact that it happens once a year, the event has many aspects that make it unusual in a church; with water spilling onto the floor it is messy; it encourages people to get out of pews to look closely which rarely happens during a Mass, baptisms being an exception; and people take pictures of the facilitators whereas families and babies are the focus of pictures at a baptism. This event foregrounds the experience of performative action. Another important form of action is that which is centred on the material objects used in ritual. The next section examines the use of one object in particular and its function in performative action.

[68] “The speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something,” and, “The speaker brings about changes in the world through his utterances, so the world changes to match the propositional content, solely in the virtue of the successful performance of the utterance.” John R. Searle, “Speech Acts, Mind and Social Reality”, in *Speech Acts, Mind and Social Reality*, ed. by Günther Grewendorf and Georg Meggle (London: Kluwer, 2002), pp. 3-16 (p. 5).

## Ciborium

The most noticeable, and for me surprising, change in the participants came at the end of the service. Normally after the Eucharist people are either calm, praying and reflecting, or they are starting to become more animated as they know they will be leaving soon. Instead of either of these, the focus increased and was directed at the altar. The following description is a detailed account of what they knew was going to happen. (I do not know whether they all knew what was happening because they were used to it from previous years, or because an explanation was given from the front of the church which I did not understand because of the language barrier.) This description is based on what could be seen, heard, and felt in the room. The words themselves did not directly impact my understanding but their tone and delivery did, as well as the reactions of those around me to the words (the tone and rhythm were useful as they made it easy to identify when a prayer was being read versus instructions given).

In a normal service the altar is full of activity and objects; however, in preparation for Good Friday (a time when Jesus' death is remembered) the altar area is cleared of decorations. The altar area was already fairly empty during the Eucharist in the Maundy Thursday service, and at the end of the Eucharist all but two metal ciboria remained. A ciborium is similar to a chalice, but rounder with a shorter stem, and has a lid that is decorated with a cross or other designs. It can be made of many materials and in this church the two used for the service were gold (if not completely made out of gold, their colour at least gave the impression of precious metal). Inside the ciboria were the blessed wafers which had been transubstantiated into the body of Christ. It is used to hold the host before and

after it is blessed, but it does not undergo any sort of transubstantiation itself. When just the ciboria were left on the altar, all the priests bowed low.

During the service a book was used for readings, which seemed to be prayers. This book was brought out again to a lectern at this point and a short reading was given by a priest. When finished, another brother[69] at the sanctuary-right[70] lectern, read from what seemed to be general information for the congregation. The atmosphere in the space shifted at this point as though what was happening was new. Without having to turn around and look at the others I could tell that the focus was directed by all towards the altar. The two priests behind the altar knelt and waited while embroidered stoles were brought in and placed over their shoulders. The priests wrapped their hands in the stoles before picking up the ciborium. They rose, carrying the ciborium around the altar where a procession formed behind them. At the same time incense was brought in by one of the brothers from sanctuary-right to in front of the altar. The cross and candles which led the procession into the church were brought out in front of the altar.

These actions were not startling or strange; there were no extra noises to accompany them which would highlight that something new and different was happening. Actually they were quite contained and subdued. Throughout this section everyone including the priests were directing their gaze towards the ciboria. Background noises seemed to diminish as people all but stopped moving, or shifting position. The actions were laden with a directed energy unexpected for such small, slow movements. The movements were reverent, careful and deliberate. Each moment weighed and considered; thought had gone into how this

[69] I was told by my Czech host that this man is in training at the monastery but is not yet a priest.
[70] The Sanctuary is the part of the church which is usually elevated by a few steps and always houses the altar. This is a substitution for the theatre term stage-right.

should best be accomplished. The priests' concentration on the objects drew other's attention.

The entire sanctuary was cleared of any remaining objects (books, cloth and Eucharistic item) by the other priests, then all present in the sanctuary formed a double line; the cross and candles in front of the two men holding the ciboria. Only two people carry the ciboria, yet revering the body of Christ is an act that each person decides to participate in or not. From the balcony in the back the choir started the singing (no organ or other instrumental accompaniment) and the congregation joined in the hymn. The altar boys with the wooden clickers were also in the recession and started by clicking three times.[71] They continued to click throughout the recession. The recession started with all in the sanctuary walking slowly down the aisle. The congregation knelt when those holding the ciboria passed by. At the end of the aisle they continued toward the chapel on the congregation's right. Those at the front of the recession (cross, candles, incense and ciborium holders, as well as a few others) entered the chapel.

The brothers and altar boys who did not enter the chapel waited outside, kneeling on the floor facing the chapel door. The altar boys continued clicking throughout until the ciboria were symbolically 'put to sleep' by the celebrant and priests.[72] Nothing was heard from within the chapel over the singing of the hymn and the clicking. Singing of the hymn by the congregation and choir continued the whole time they were in the chapel. Upon emerging those who had been in the chapel turned to face the chapel and knelt on the floor. The cross, candles, and incense were left in the chapel. Then all those who had recessed to the chapel and

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[71] One movement of the wrist results in multiple (five or more) distinct sounds. So each 'click' is a burst of sound.
[72] The ciboria will be under constant prayer vigil until the next service which is Good Friday.

had prayed, stood, reformed the lines of the recession, and recessed out of the church, with the celebrant as the last to leave the church.

With the recession complete, members of the congregation either continued to pray or started to file into the chapel to pray in the presence of the transubstantiated bread and a statue of Jesus. The chapel had been redecorated and renamed (my Czech hosts explained that this had been announced during the service) the Holy Sepulchre until Easter Sunday, which is the name of the tomb in which Jesus was placed. A life sized stone statue of a dead Jesus was laid out in the chapel in an illumnated box with glass sides. Jesus, in the form of the consecrated bread in the ciboria, was placed in a small decorated box on the wall above the statue. The smoke from the incense was visible coming out the door of the chapel. Those who went into the chapel stayed for a minute or up to twenty minutes. Others, who could not enter or chose not to, knelt on the floor in line with the door of the chapel, or stayed praying in pews close to the chapel. It was only when looking directly in the door of the chapel that it was obvious why the focus and sense of direction continued even though the service ended.

A vigil was kept for the next nineteen hours until the Good Friday service began. The Maundy Thursday service is the beginning of three days called the Tridiuum. Thursday, Friday and Saturday function together so that the liturgy does not effectively end from the time it begins on Thursday to either the midnight service on Saturday or the dawn service on Sunday. Without realising that this was the case, I was able to feel the progression from one to the next and noticed that the services did not have formal ends to them. They were continuations, not new beginnings. Each time the participants gathered it was as

if they were picking up where they had left off, not starting a new and distinct event.

During this part of the service the ciborium played a key role in the performance. I want to focus on this object and how it functions in relation to the Easter services. Objects are used in the liturgy as vehicles for action, e.g. they facilitate the distribution of communion which allows the participants to eat the bread. While all the objects used in the liturgy may have symbolic meaning or other personal meanings that individuals associate with the objects, the objects are also always part of the meanings created in the space during the performance. The ciborium is used each week during the Eucharist, but on Maundy Thursday its use continues in a highly visible way after the Eucharistic celebration is over. Normally any leftover blessed and transubstantiated bread is placed in the ciborium and stored near the altar, or in a side chapel.[73] On Maundy Thursday it becomes an object used for its performance capabilities; the ciborium is intrinsic to the liturgical and performative action.

A clear purpose is served by the ciborium and it is brought into the liturgy through performative actions, i.e. linguistic actions and physical actions. When the priest retells the story of the Last Supper and Jesus command's to eat bread as a sign of his body and drink wine as a sign of his blood, he reiterates Jesus' speech acts, e.g. 'Take,' 'Eat' and 'Drink.'[74] As with the foot washing this

[73] This is a practice that I saw in many churches. When transubstantiated bread is present in a church there is often a red light lit near the altar or at a side chapel or side altar. People will often visit churches during the week to pray in the presence of Christ.

[74] While the Roman Catholic Church teaches that when these elements are blessed they are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus, he did not spell out that procedure in the few sentences recorded in the Biblical accounts and therefore I have used the phrasing 'sign of.' Matthew 26:26-28: "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat,' he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (NJB). The phrasing here corresponds to implicit speech acts because the verb is

example is part of the interplay “between words, concepts, and practices that constitute” the Christian liturgical “discursive tradition.”[75] The blessing of the bread is a combined speech act and embodied performative action (blessing requires the body as well) that has been repeated for thousands of years. Similarly the physical action of eating the bread calls on the bodies of the participants to repeat and perform the ritual instigated by Jesus.[76] The participants inhabit the norms of Eucharist participation in multiple ways (eating, praying, reciting) and thereby demonstrate their agency. By the time the Maundy Thursday service comes to a close the bread is already laden with meanings that go far beyond the performative aspects mentioned.

In the final recession the ciborium produces other new meanings that it does not usually claim from week to week. As the final recession out of the church is one of taking the ‘body’ to the tomb of the Holy Sepulchre, the ciboria (both of them, in this instance) become the sarcophagus that holds the body. The object becomes the site of the remembrance of actions – those of Jesus breaking bread, and of Jesus’ broken body being taken to the tomb.[77] The relevance of the object in the liturgical action at the end of the service is significant because it allows participants to both mourn and celebrate by engaging in communal prayer.

This section of the service, from the draping of the stoles to the time in the chapel, is short; no longer than five minutes for the recession and five minutes in the chapel. The actions and objects used can be easily listed. Everything on this

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imperative instead of first person singular, e.g. I command you to take and eat, vs. take and eat.

[75] Mahmood, p. 180.

[76] As a symbol for the type of object Jesus would have used during the Last Supper it represents continuity with the past, but also discontinuity because its use developed in the church, and not because of the original act, i.e., Jesus did not use little wafers and did not use any vessel like a ciborium to store bread in. The ciborium as an object points to an original ciborium and to all the ciboria used in every church. It is a visible link with the past, with all other Christians and with the future use of the object.

[77] For those who believe, the body of Jesus really is in the Ciborium and so the body is being taken to the chapel to be ‘put to sleep.’

list happens in view of the congregation. They are enacted by the priest or another person who is part of the lay ministry and leads sections of the service. As it is impossible to create an altar big enough for all to worship at, the priest is the performer who uses the main altar. He performs for the rest of the performers who participate from their pews. The actions undertaken by the priest, with the exception perhaps of blessing the bread and the people, are performed as if the congregation themselves have also performed. By this I mean that the congregation feels as if they are implicated in the production of these actions, although they watch what is happening.[78] There is a linking of action from those who 'accomplish' it to those who watch it, so that those who watch are responsible as well. Some actions are done by the congregation, others shared by all, and sometimes while the action may be done by all, a unique response is produced by the individual. Some of these actions are performative and others simply facilitate the performance. All those present for the Mass accomplish both kinds of actions. The following is a list of all the actions that took place at the end of the service.

List of actions:

1. clearing the altar of everything but the cloth and the ciborium and bread
2. putting the host in the ciborium
3. putting the lid on the ciborium
4. bowing to the ciborium
5. bring out order of service
6. all stand
7. reading from the order of service
8. book taken away
9. reading from red book with instructions/clarifications for the participants
10. kneel behind altar
11. bring in cloth stoles
12. drape stoles
13. wrap hands in stoles

[78] The participants are completely implicated in every part of the service, but they do not have the authority to undertake certain actions such as blessing the bread and wine. This is linked to Rancière and shows some of the unique positions held by facilitators versus participants which are never altered.

14. pick up ciborium
15. incense brought in
16. cross and candles brought to the centre
17. form recession
18. singing begins
19. clicking starts, always in threes
20. recess down aisle
21. waving of incense
22. congregation kneel as the recession passes them by
23. kneel in front of the chapel
24. enter the chapel
25. incense the chapel
26. put host away in chapel
27. exit chapel
28. kneel in front of chapel
29. pray
30. recess out of church
31. congregation enters chapel
32. pray in chapel
33. kneel in front of chapel to pray
34. vigil

Given the number of actions which took place in such a short space of time, this section might have seemed rushed, but it felt as if it was one long, held note or breath. There was no break in the energy or focus of the group as they observed and participated in the placing of the ciborium in the chapel. As people came and went from the chapel in prayer the energy started to dissipate a little, but there was still a sense of focus as people moved to exit the church building. The actions built upon each other and somehow maintained the performance space, even though the 'performance proper' had finished. The combination of all these actions is an example of how the liturgy works. It is not an unending series of performative actions and speech acts that makes the liturgy performative, but the relationships "articulated between words, concepts, and practices" in this discursive tradition." They are undertaken with the intention to enact both a repetition and reiteration of the liturgical ritual itself, and the rituals of all believers from the Last Supper onwards. The last ten minutes of the Maundy Thursday service are special because they highlight the burial in symbolic and

performative ways. Participants create and embody the actions thus enabling the performance.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday are about the past as they focus on Jesus' last night with his followers, death the next day and the mourning on Saturday. The liturgy is used to re-play the past in these three days. Jesus is dead and the congregation will do as his first followers did and mourn his passing. Although Jesus did not die on the Thursday, but on the Friday, Thursday was the first day that he made his death explicit through a pre-enactment of (what was to be) the ritual of remembrance.[79] This first enactment (of the Last Supper) was done by the person for whom the ritual would later be performed. According to Roman Catholic tradition even these first actions transformed the symbols into Christ's flesh and blood. The real (the person of Jesus) and the symbolic (the bread and wine) – and for some, the real again in the transubstantiated bread and wine – were present in the same space.

Fittingly, Maundy Thursday is in fact a pre-remembrance of what is celebrated on Friday and Sunday. Instead of waiting for the day (Friday) of remembrance, Maundy Thursday is used as a pre-remembrance of a pre-remembrance of death. This original meal, where bread and wine were linked to body and blood, became the ritual of remembering a sacrificial crucifixion. Repeating the ritual through the celebration of the Eucharist and then putting the bread 'body' with a statue 'body' makes the link explicit, physical and material. Where the Eucharist is normally used as way to remember Jesus, on Maundy Thursday it becomes a way to follow him through his last day. Watching the bread be 'put to sleep' and maintaining a vigil over it is a way to performatively

[79] I am indebted to Rebecca Schneider for a discussion about this idea which helped me to articulate this section.

wait with Jesus in the garden for the soldiers to arrest him.[80] Performing the vigil, praying with the stone 'body' as well as the bread 'body' connects the believers with the Jesus of the past as well as with their belief in a resurrected Jesus. Because this service ends, not with a hymn and a blessing, but with a time of prayer leading into a vigil, the actions of the service do not have a formal end in the space. These actions effect further actions of the participants as they leave the space and make their way home. When the priests and servers leave the space the rest of the participants take over the praying and revering.

For those who take part in the vigil overnight and the following morning the linking of services is concrete. For the others the service time follows them home and creates a sense of waiting for the next service to begin. Whether aware of it or not, participating in the performance of Maundy Thursday prepares the participant for the series of five days of services. It helps to link the actions of the liturgy with the day to day actions of the participant. In this way the liturgy creates a sense of continuity for the participants as they imagine themselves in the past at the first Eucharist while also reminding them that the actions of belief are relevant to contemporary life.

This recasting is applicable to actions in the Maundy Thursday service. Aspects of it, such as the foot washing, show a daily activity in Jesus' time that is not often performed today (although people still need to wash their feet today, it is unusual to have someone else wash your feet every day). The carrying of the ciborium to the Holy Sepulchre is an action which is important within the service although mundane at its most basic level (because it is a means to an end – getting the bread from the altar to the chapel) yet as part of the ritual it is

[80] In the Bible Jesus went to a Garden to pray after the Passover meal. He was betrayed by one of his followers and Roman guards came to arrest him there.

elevated. The ritual is not necessary or useful, it exists because of the hundreds of thousands of times it has been undertaken before. Recessing with the ciborium is not simply putting the 'bread' away for the vigil. It is the carrying of the body of Jesus to the tomb. The actions taken by his followers after his death are re-created in the church with the 'live' body. The use of the statue reinforces the interplay of "words, concepts, and practices" through which the discursive tradition makes sense to the participants; the reality of the death of Christ is spoken, listened to, prayed together, eaten and seen by providing a visual prop. The prop is not itself necessary to belief as those who come for the ritual already believe in the death and resurrection. The procession and reverence of the 'live' in the ciborium with the 'dead' of the statue is relevant to belief through its use of objects. The contemporary objects can be associated with objects used by the first believers as well as all those who have previously participated in the ritual. The combined actions of all who have come before have created a situation wherein the actions of the past, present and future are layered.

The co-existent states (past, present, future) which create the liturgical action function together seamlessly. The action of recessing with the ciborium recasts those in the space as re-creators of the past through the re-production of mimetic acts. Instead of simply producing a representation of the original, the recession is an example of the "specific logic of the discourse of piety" whereby participants engage in present action that performs their belief.[81]

These performative acts happen in a present day procession, which draws on all previous meanings in order to exist, but also adds to these meanings in order to make meaning in the present enactment. The new meaning that is created

[81] Mahmood, p. 180.

in the present provides the basis for the next set of performative acts. Each subsequent re-production does not use the first enactment two thousand years ago, but uses a conglomeration of all the enactments including the last known actions performed by the community. This is not a commemoration; this is present action.

The Maundy Thursday procession is different from the expected procession and recession of the priests and servers that happens at every Mass. The purpose is not simply to enable the entry/exit of many people or to provide a beginning/ending for the service. This procession accomplishes an action – that of putting the 'body' in the place where it is 'dead.' Once a year this 'body' is not just talked about as dead, but is physically put in a space that is prepared for the dead. The interplay of life and death which is so much a part of rituals around the world is most clearly shown in the Christian tradition throughout Easter and it is possible because of the physicality and materiality of the ritual. The *live* of the bread 'body' is placed in the same space with the *dead* of the statue 'body.' The renaming of the chapel to Holy Sepulchre recasts it as a site of remembrance of the dead (both Jesus and those who visited the tomb the first time) and produces a physical space in the church. This physical space of the 'tomb' enables the layers of the performance of belief to exists together: the past (two thousand years ago), the past of every subsequent Easter, the present expression of belief and the future hope of resurrection. Again, the actions of belief are used to act, to be present, to create – not simply to represent.

The actions in the liturgy are relevant to each member of the community for their immediate use and for the implications of the actions in the past, in the future and eternally. The experience of the Eucharist happens in the present but is

'doubled,' to borrow a common phrase of poststructuralists, or even 'tripled' in the moment of performance. This tripling happens in two directions from the moment of performance – into the past where the first employment of the symbols happened, and into the future where they will continue to be used. In the entire liturgy the Eucharist is the only concrete action which is known to have been done by the first Christians.[82] The first enactment of the Eucharist, performed by Jesus, was a pre-enactment of a ritual of remembrance that was to come; as such each enactment is a pre-enactment of the next. Therefore the belief in each weekly service influences all performances to come. So participating in this event involves engaging the 'belief in' the ritual, in its meaning in the moment, in its continued meaning for those in the future and for the realization that each enactment is part of the pre-remembrance as well as the end remembrance.

Throughout this section there is a constant interplay of the presentational reality, social reality of the total event and a kind of dramatic fiction. The procession with the ciboria does mimic a funeral procession and the laying to rest of the body of Christ. This is as close as it comes to dramatic fiction because no one is actually cast in a role and no one 'plays' Jesus. The facilitators carry the ciboria and lead the procession, but they are the stand in for everyone who sits in the pew. Everyone in the room is implicated in the procession which is part of the social reality of the event; to be present is to agree to the conditions of performance.

The presentational reality asserts itself in the task-based nature of the actions. Preparing the ciboria, cleaning the altar and sanctuary spaces, processing

[82] Early Christian worship services are believed to have been made up of elements of the Jewish tradition involving readings from the scriptures and singing of psalms as well as the added ritual of the Eucharist.

in a large group, organising the interaction with the material objects in the chapel – all of these require bodies to do real work that is not a pretence. The social reality is also at the fore as those in the pews crane their necks to see the procession as it goes by, wait for a turn to enter the chapel to pray and talk with friends after the service ends. It is the tension between these elements that each individual in the space has to contend with throughout the performance. From moment to moment each person makes decisions about which element will receive focus.

To return to Rancière, the blurring of those who act and those who look was again at play. We have already established that the congregation are not passive receivers of the liturgical action. Likewise, the facilitators, whether priests, the choir, or the boys who use the wooden clickers are all equally engaged in looking and interpreting while they are also engaged in actions that enable the service to take place. Those in the recession look at the people they pass in the pews on the way to the chapel. They pay attention to stand in the correct positions so that those in the chapel can exit easily. They look at the transformation of the church that has taken place. Those in the pews make associations between this service and others, they interpret what they see, compare ideas or experiences, find themselves distracted by other people and are also taken away by the events that unfold in the church. The recession is one element of a larger service and in this short example there are a multiplicity of elements that shape each person's unique experience.

**Easter Sunday**

*St. Václav Kostel (St. Wenceslas Church)*
*Radešinska Svratka, Sunday 27 March 2005*

The central performance of the liturgy during Easter Week is the Sunday service. During this service the musical instruments (organ and bells) that were silenced on Thursday are used at every opportunity, there is often a baptism, and the words 'alleluia' and 'hosanna,' which were proscribed during the forty days of Lent, are used to start the service. The greeting that believers say to each other on Sunday is "Alleluia, the Lord is risen" and the answer is "He is risen indeed, alleluia!"[83] The joyful nature of this service was no different in the Czech Republic; however, there was one added ritual which is unique to this country.



Figure 1

When I arrived in the village of Radešinska Svratka there was a cake in the shape of a lamb sitting on the sideboard in the house where I stayed (Figure 1).[84] The cake was decorated with powdered sugar, had raisin eyes, and a ribbon with a bell around its neck. The explanation of the cake was that it was to be

[83] This is what is said in English. My Czech hosts' translation of what was said in Czech was very similar.
[84] Photograph taken by Megan Macdonald, 2005.

taken into church on Easter Sunday to be blessed.[85] It was important to bake the cake on or before Maundy Thursday so that the baking was finished before the formal remembrance of Jesus dying was enacted. The name for this cake is 'Beranek' which is literally 'lamb.' The cake is kept at home from the time it is baked until Sunday morning when it is taken to the church to be blessed by the priest in front of all participants. Once blessed, it will be carried home and eaten.

The importance of the cake is how it shows that material elements are incorporated into and a vital part of the performance of belief. The performance of belief is produced not only during the liturgy through liturgical elements but also by elements which are brought by participants and intersect with liturgical elements. As an object the cake is part of a layering of representative meanings that are added to over the course of Easter: it represents Jesus who is often referred to as the Lamb of God, as well as representing believers who are spoken of as lambs following Jesus, the good shepherd. The actions undertaken in the home on Thursday are part of the larger preparations for Sunday. What starts as a cake that celebrates the end of abstaining from sugar and fats during the forty days of Lent becomes a reminder in the kitchen of the sacrificial meaning of Easter. Once it is taken into the church, and in this case, placed around the altar, it is part of the service and receives a blessing, as do the participants and the body (bread wafers) of Christ. This object is not just a site of representation because of

[85] The Beranek is a custom only carried out in the Czech Republic and is allowed by the Roman Catholic Church. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes provision for such deviation: "Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See. Devotions proper to individual Churches also have a special dignity if they are undertaken by mandate of the bishops according to customs or books lawfully approved. But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican Council, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_ 19631204_sacrosanctum -concilium_en.html> [accessed 16 April 2009] Chapter 1 Section 13).

how it is created and consumed. The cake is a representation of the body of Christ, but this object is created by the participants outside of the church. It is not an object like the ciborium which is provided by the church, and the actions which bring it into being are not carried out in the church but in the home. The Beranek makes the same journey as the participants – from their houses into the church and back to the house. The participants in each house are part of creating the interweaving of worship space with home life. The blurring of distinct spaces is ongoing throughout Holy Week.

The use of the Beranek is not just representative, however, as it also functions performatively. The cake remains just a cake, and is caught up with being a cake – it can only be baked so many days before the service or it will mould, it has to be stable enough to sustain transportation to the service, and it must be delicious enough to be eaten. Its entire purpose from beginning to end is to be eaten. It is not a pretend eating, a staged eating, or a symbolic consumption. It is not like the communion wafers which are blessed during the service and provide spiritual sustenance but no substantial nutrients; this cake, which is also, 'a sign' for Jesus' body does provide nutrition. The eating of the cake does not happen during the service and so is not strictly a part of the liturgy. Eating the cake in the home places importance on the actions related to it, which are equated with those performed in the liturgy: the baking and eating of the cake become acts of worship, acts of the liturgy, accomplished in the home. The entire cake must be eaten because it has been blessed (just as the transubstantiated bread must be eaten), although not necessarily on the Sunday. The liturgy makes room for the blessing of the cake to happen during the Easter celebration and the cake

is likewise dependent on the liturgy to fulfill its performative function of being eaten.

With the Beranek each baker completes a task-based action. Once placed in the church all together they present a tangible reminder of both the presentational reality of the liturgy as an event that needs people in order for it to exist as well as the social reality that the cakes were baked by individuals in the church congregation. The cakes bring the social reality of the village into the church building. After returning to the houses the cakes continue to act as material reminders of the events over Easter week. The presence of the cakes emphasizes the individuals who brought them as contributors to the preparation and facilitation of the event. This creates a different dynamic between those who look and those who act in relation to the cakes. The bakers are not singled-out for their contributions, nor asked to self-identify with the individual cakes that they have produced. The results of the actions are seen by everyone in the space and in these moments everyone is a 'looker' including those who baked, because they are also looking at the cakes made by others and each cake is unique in appearance.

In relation to the material aspects of belief in the life of the believer the Beranek is part of the unending nature of liturgical action that precedes and flows from the weekly reiterations of the liturgy. The lives of participants are full of actions that come from and feed back into liturgical action. The performative action of the liturgy is not just predicated on what happens week by week, but on what happens in the lives of those who participate. Christian belief is an action that continues beyond the confines of the space or of the participants' gathering.

The experience of the body in the space is not to be overlooked in this situation where the role of the body is not to observe, but to participate.

The potential exists for the participant to feel that the liturgy somehow 'performs' them, or 'performs through' them, as once the liturgy is memorized it is possible to be immersed in the flow of the ritual and engage with the experience instead of worrying about what happens next. This can be an intense spiritual experience and it can also slide into physical passivity towards the liturgy. Ideally most participants do not stay in a passive mode while performing but find that some weeks one aspect of the service seems more relevant that another. If they continue to engage with at least some parts of the service each week, whether this be with the music, the sermon, the prayers or the receiving of the Eucharist, they continue to perform the liturgical action in an active way. On some level as long as the body is performing the action the action happens, regardless of the intention. Whether intention can return once it has been 'lost' is an ongoing issue for believers around the world.

All of these examples from Easter week highlight how the performance of the liturgy is material and performative. The performance of belief as it happens through the liturgy is dependent on performative actions which are not reliant on representative meanings for their power and relevance. The liturgy encourages the participant to continuing enacting the performance in the rest of their lives. The demands the liturgy makes on the body do not end when the person leaves the space. The practices of confessing and forgiving, eating and drinking, kneeling, sitting, standing, and singing are all used in the everyday life of the participant. When these actions surface in daily life they act as citations of the service, just as their occurrence in the service cites daily life. The

interconnectedness that can exist through these activities links all action for the participant. The last line of the liturgy is imperative – "Go, in peace." This speech act which is a Directive orders the participant to take that which has happened in the liturgy out into the world. The experience of the liturgy ends with yet more action.

The separateness of actor and spectator in Rancière's theories are profitably applied to the priests/facilitators and participants/congregation. In the liturgy, it is through their separateness from one another that they possess an equal capacity; the congregation is not passive and do not need to lead the liturgy in order to participate. All are equal in the eyes of God, but each takes specific roles, performs specific and different actions in the practice of liturgy.

The congregation is not passive, neither physically nor intellectually, because each person observes, selects, compares, interprets and links information and experiences. Those facilitating do the same, from a different vantage point. The sheer variety of actions that take place over the course of the Easter services creates a different viewing environment for those who attend. Actions which do occur each week in the normal Mass are placed before and after other actions which are seen only once a year. This changes the relationship of the participant to the action and offers the opportunity to interpret it differently. This multiplicity of liturgical actions alongside the larger numbers of participants amplifies the importance of each action; more people are watching, more people are participating.

The frames through which the performance is experience shift throughout for each person in the room. As I have shown, the presentational reality and the social reality dominate the performance and there are also moments where

aspects of dramatic fiction are also at play. The traditional comparison of the congregation to an audience and the priests to actors are simply not tenable. There is sufficient evidence to argue for active participation by all who are present. The enactment of the liturgy is an event that challenges oppositions and blurs boundaries.

**Conclusion**

I began this chapter by positioning the liturgy in its historical context to show how the most recent decisions, made by the Roman Catholic Church during Vatican II, took into account the importance of the liturgy as action. As mentioned earlier, "the ultimate goal" of Vatican II was the "participation and active involvement of the people of God in the liturgical celebration."[86] The elements that I have examined show various ways that people are cast as participants in the liturgy as well as how active performative involvement is one important way that meaning is made. What I have done is but one attempt to view the liturgy, as Trevor A. Hart wrote, as "putting the 'story' or 'text' into play through continuous fresh action…rather than being measured in terms of the alleged correspondence between some 'text' and a state of affairs lying 'beyond' or 'outside' it.[87] There is no way to completely escape the kinds of analysis that dwell on representative meaning. Western culture has excelled in applying metaphysical frameworks in all areas of knowledge. Yet there is much that goes unacknowledged by such an approach. This case study is an important step towards redressing that balance and demonstrating the relevance of performance approaches to the religious rituals in Western culture.

[86] Anibale Bugnini in Reid, p. 291.
[87] Trevor A. Hart, 'Introduction', p. 4.

# CHAPTER 4
# FORM AND SPIRITUALITY IN PERFORMANCE ART

The interplay of various conceptions of the physical and material has thus far been examined through philosophy, language, anthropology and theology. The chapters have shown that the treatment of metaphysical versus embodied ideas is a persistent problem. To this point most examples have been taken from Christian practices. As part of this focus, I have shown how performance approaches are notably absent from theological engagements with the performance of the liturgy. And I have demonstrated that Christian thought is embedded in the academic fields from which performance studies has drawn its influence. Since theology has not been employed by performance analyses, my objectives in this chapter are to examine contemporary performance art as part of the Western paradigm and to show how performance analyses benefit from an awareness of Christian theology.

This chapter begins with a section on the tradition of art as it has been used in the liturgy. The section focuses on the historical shift from art as divine presence to secular creation. The change in art was part of a larger social shift that radically affected the role of ritual and the role of art in religious/spiritual matters. This section links the theology of the last chapter with the case study on performance art of this chapter. The case study begins with an introduction to Marina Abramović's artistic practices from the 1960s to the present in order to provide some background to her work. Over the years her work has often been compared with spiritual practices, but not always in critical or accurate ways. Two are highlighted and discussed: Shamanism and New Age practices. From there the case study of Abramović's work begins with descriptions of three of her pieces, followed by her explanations of her work. The chapter concludes with an extended analysis of not only her work but of the critical responses written by

artists and academics about Abramović.

This chapter acts as the last piece of the answer to the opening question of how to discuss the performance of belief. The ideas from the previous chapters are employed here to strengthen the argument for the relevance of considering Christian practices in relation to contemporary performance art. The second case study is not meant to act as a comparison with the first on liturgy, instead it is a continuation of the challenge set by the first. By this I mean the challenge to the conception that Western culture, and thereby also cultural products like performance art, have somehow evaded their Christian spiritual history. To begin I turn to the interaction of art with Christian liturgical practice.

### VISUAL ART

The history of art overlaps with the history of religion in the Western tradition because most art was produced for religious purposes. When society's religious needs change, so does the art associated with the religion. In the West art had long been used not only to think about human relationships with the divine, but as an actual avenue to the divine; specific kinds of art were understood to be imbued with divine presence. Any interaction with such art was also an interaction with the divine. And it is to the question of interaction that I now turn. To do so, I draw on Hans Belting's book *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*.

Belting explains in detail that there are distinct differences in the present day distinctions between images and art, and the previous understandings which existed for most of Western history. The religious image was used in fairly static ways from late antiquity (sixth century) to the time of the Renaissance. During the Renaissance it underwent a significant shift as societal views on art changed

such that the 'era of images' gave way to the 'era of art.'

During the 'era of images' the use of images was widespread and most (if not all) were, as Belting explains, associated with the 'Holy Image':

> The image, understood in this manner, not only represented a person but also was treated like a person, being worshipped, despised, or carried from place to place in ritual processions: in short, it served in the symbolic exchange of power and, finally, embodied the public claims of a community.[1]

The image was part of rituals and practices and it was believed to contain a presence, whether that of a person, God, or some other form of spiritual power. These early worship practices were part of a larger web of meaning creation that was far from autonomous; they assumed the work of painting and sculpture was being carried out either in the service of religious institutions, or as a form of worship in itself. The interaction of the person with the object began with the creator/artist and included the owner or observer of the image. The use of the image as a means of connecting to the divine was also used in churches during this period.[2]

A specific use of the image existed in relation to the liturgy itself as images were painted in the interior of churches. Some of these images were portraits of major figures such as Jesus or the saints. These were used for veneration and worship, as with the 'Holy Images' that people carried on their person. However another specific kind of image existed almost exclusively in the church building and was an important part of the liturgy. Narrative scenes were painted on walls as well as on altarpieces, and Belting emphasises the importance of the location: "the narrative images exist nowhere else than in the very church

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[1] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. xxi.

[2] This was not without problems at various points. Belting goes into great detail about the tensions that existed between pagan practices using images and the eventual acceptance of images as part of the Christian tradition.

interior—that is, the site of the liturgy."[3] The images were not extraneous to the liturgy but another participant who "paradoxically brings about an enhanced sense of reality."[4] Instead of being seen simply as a static representation of the past, these images were understood to interact with the present moments of liturgical action. The most important part of Christian worship, the Eucharist, was framed by images that were believed to contain divine presence.

However, there is another layer of meaning implied in these images which would have been taken for granted at the time and is no longer assumed today. The narrative images were not understood as representations of the people and events they depicted; they were painted as present action and understood as dynamic elements of the liturgical action. Belting provides the example of a church in Macedonia to reinforce his point that the images were perceived as the present and not the past:

> The Communion of the Apostles in the apse of St. Sophia in Ohrid (Macedonia), a fresco from the mid-eleventh century, does not portray the historical event of the Last Supper in Jerusalem, but a contemporary ritual, which reenacts the event every day. The communion of the faithful, which took place in the room before the image, is literally prefigured in the apostles' communion.[5]

The fresco was conceived of and executed as an active part of the liturgy. Participants were meant to understand that what they did in the church was an important contemporary event with spiritual relevance. The painting was not just a prop, but also another form of the original event. This is not simply a discussion of whether or not images were important, but of how those images were understood in relation to the worldview of the people at the time. Participants enacted the Eucharistic rite while interacting with the images.

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[3] Belting, p. 173.
[4] Belting, p. 174.
[5] Belting, p. 174.

An important aspect to this relationship with images is the nature of the participants' conception of time and reality. In order for images to 'interact' with people and for narrative scenes to be understood as active, a different ordering of reality is necessary. Belting clarifies how the divine world was more 'real' to the participants because it was the most important:

> The liturgy created its own experience of time, which embraced both the revelation of God in the past and the fulfilment of time in the future. The present was only a transition to timelessness, which had already begun in the liturgical sphere of the icons. In this way the image took on a social function. It made visible the world that the prevailing worldview had defined as the only true reality.[6]

The present, in Belting's explanation, is only a place of transition, and the destination is the fulfilment of time and being with God. Reality is the divine existence and it is glimpsed through participation in worship, through meditation and interaction with 'Holy Images.' The images are important because they provide access to moments when God was present on earth, such as the fresco of the Apostles, and also make the desired heavenly sphere accessible. These explanations should recall the descriptions of Plato's conception of 'reality' as the 'ideal place' to which the soul would one day return. However, where everything on earth was but representation for Plato, these 'Holy Images' were seen as reality. As well, participation with the images was meant to bring the entire person into contact with the divine and not just the soul.

The location, as well as the presence, of the images in the church encouraged interaction as part of the ongoing actions of the liturgy. In the worldview Belting describes reality is found in the presence of the divine and the images were understood to contain that presence. The entire interior of the church is liturgical space and the use of the images allows the space to "tak[e] on the

[6] Belting, p. 174.

quality of an immense, universal pictorial space in which all the individual images participate."[7] This is then brought together with the actions of the liturgy and the "two levels of reality—the historical event and its liturgical reenactment within the church" become "virtually inseparable."[8] The images and the actions together create the space and the dynamic forms of participation.

The composition of the images was important because they needed to be visible from a distance. Belting highlights "equal dimensions," "a symmetrical arrangement," an "overall gold background," and a "standard size of the figures" as key features that "create a sense of internal order."[9] The layout of the images is also key as they interact with each other and with the space: "The images are conceived as single icons and at the same time form part of a sequence following the architectural structure, as if the scenes depicted were taking place within the same space and against a common horizon."[10] In this way images, the liturgical calendar and the enactment of the liturgy worked together to create a totality. Participants then became part of the larger spiritual reality. However, as Belting demonstrates throughout the book, images were constantly shifting in their uses and meanings. With changes in art came changes in the notion of the image, which impacted its religious use.

The shift in art that happened during the Renaissance was part of larger social changes that included the effects of the Reformation.[11] During the Reformation, while images were not banned altogether, a main argument for their

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[7] Belting, p. 179.
[8] Belting, p. 179.
[9] Belting, p. 178.
[10] Belting, p. 178.
[11] Each country in Europe has its own history as to when and how the use of images changed in relation to the form of Christianity practiced and any reforms that happened to church practices. Belting looks in detail at many countries from north to south and accounts for changes in Protestant as well as Catholic countries.

removal from churches was to prevent them from being “set in God’s place.”[12] German reformer Martin Luther was against the images having a power in and of themselves. He thus argued that, “they should be stripped of their function. It is, after all, the beholder who is free to use the image.”[13] Part of the new conception of images was that they were inert and only contained meaning if and when imparted by the beholder.

The impact of these changes immediately altered the average person’s relationship to art. People started to collect images in their homes, at least those who could afford to, and the images they collected were focussed on the secular sphere: “Images, which had lost their function in the church, took on a new role in representing art.”[14] Interaction with images was taken from the religious sphere and moved to an initially more private arena.

As the presence of the image and its use changed so too did the overarching concept of images. This is not as simple as saying that the religious gave way to the secular or that the old images lost their “aura”, or that a new definition was simply applied to everything.[15] Religion was no longer accorded special status within society which meant that artistic prestige was lost for artists who produced religious paintings. Art associated with the church was subsumed into this “segregated area” of the religious, and art in general “ceased to be a religious phenomenon in itself.”[16]

Art had been concerned with showing divine reality and connecting participants in religious worship to God’s presence. All art had been understood as working towards this main goal. When the “unified concept of the image was

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[12] Belting, p. 458.
[13] Martin Luther in Belting, p. 458.
[14] Belting, p. 458.
[15] Belting, p. 458.
[16] Belting, p. 458.

given up" art changed, but there was little recognition as to what had been lost.[17] Belting explains that when all images were brought together as 'art' the understanding of how to interact with art in a religious way was lost as well; this "loss was obscured by the label "art," which now was generally applied."[18] From this point on art was associated with representation and secular images. Where earlier images had been understood as inspired creations meant for worship and imbued with presence, the new images were purely creations of the imagination.

Belting's retelling of this historical moment points to a problem which continues to plague the creation and reception of spiritual and religious art: there is no shared understanding of how to identify and then interact with art that may be religious/spiritual in nature. Image-literacy was lost in the shift from the 'era of images' to the 'ear of art.' The ability to 'read' the image was strongly linked to the ability to find meaning in the image: "the painter now became a poet and as such had the claim of poetic freedom, including that of interpreting religious truths. The religious subject, in the end, could be invented only by the artist, since it could not actually be seen, like the objects in a still life or landscape."[19] A piece of art now only contained the meanings that the painter had in mind, and thus could be interpreted in a myriad of ways by those who looked at the image.

The concept of a presence, a specific spiritual presence, was no longer possible. What replaced it was the presence of the work itself: "The new presence *of* the work succeeds the former presence of an idea that is made visible in the work."[20] The process that took place in order to accomplish this shift made it

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[17] Belting, p. 458.
[18] Belting, p. 458.
[19] Belting, p. 459.
[20] "The new painting called for a hermeneutics of art of the sort that had been applied previously to literature. It now is no longer enough to tell the stories of images, as was done in this book as well. Images find their place in the temple of art and their true time in the history of art. A picture

seem ridiculous that an image might have a deeper meaning, for example, "[a]n image of Venus that was not a work of art would have been outright nonsense."[21] This makes sense in our contemporary society where art can be anything the artist can imagine, but there was a time when this was still a new concept. And it caused significant confusion because art went from showing spiritual reality to, "fictions [and] beautiful illusions."[22] This then changed how older images were viewed; they too were seen as "beautiful illusions." Understandings of older images had all been based in the 'real,' but this 'real' was based in religious meanings and traditions. The combined change of religion and art meant that there was no longer a shared base of meanings. Art was no longer 'real,' instead it represented the real, as in portraits, or it imagined a different kind of reality.

The old narrative panels depicted what was believed to be real scenes that had taken place. The new pieces of art, which could be drawn completely from the imagination of the artist, "invited the beholder not to take its subject matter literally but to look for the artistic idea behind the work."[23] Credence was given to images that depicted the beautiful and profound regardless of the inspiration for the image. Belting argues that this created a "crisis of the image."[24] From the late 1500s to the mid 1600s there were dissenting opinions on how to understand religious iconography in images. Conflicting understandings and interpretations existed side by side throughout this period and continued to change over the centuries.[25] While Western society has moved past this initial crisis of the image,

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is no longer to be understood in terms of its theme, but a contribution to the development of art." Belting, p. 459.

[21] Belting, p. 472.

[22] Belting, p. 472.

[23] Belting, p. 472.

[24] Belting, p. 472.

[25] In the Orthodox tradition Icons are still used for prayer and meditation, and people refer to praying in the presence of icons.

there is still a general unease when it comes to spiritual art. If art is identified as religious/spiritual it is often subject to clarifications, justifications and historicizations that aim to make it accessible to all regardless of religious affiliation. As we will see in the case study on Abramović's art, it is still difficult to find a shared base of meaning when discussing art as spiritual. I will return to these ideas when analysing Abramović's work in the following case study.

### THE ART OF MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

> But I also don't believe…that living through art we can change society. I really think that deep spirituality is the real key, and not art. Art is one of the tools, but not the only one. *Marina Abramović, 2006*[26]

In November of 2002 a performance event took place in the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City which would become a reference point for performance art that year. Not only widely reviewed in the press,[27] Marina Abramović's *The House With the Ocean View* was also written about by artists, academics, and Abramović herself in a book documenting the entire event, as well as entering the pop-culture consciousness when it was used for an episode of *Sex and the City*.[28] It is precisely because of the volume of commentary that exists about her work that Abramović is both interesting and useful to my dissertation. In this case

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[26] Marina Abramović in 'Pure Raw Performance, Pedagogy, and (Re)presentation: Marina Abramovic; interviewed by Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien', Chris Thompson and Katarina Weslien, *PAJ*, 82 (2006), 29-50 (p. 29).

[27] Steven Henry Madoff, 'A Viewable Fast, Enforced by Knives,' *New York Times* 10 November (2002), <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/10/theater/a-viewable-fast-enforced-by-knives.html> [Accessed 10 March 2009]; Roberta Smith, 'When Seeing Is Not Only Believing, but Also Creating,' *New York Times* 22 November (2002), <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/22/arts/art-review-where-seeing-is-not-only-believing-but-also-creating.html> [Accessed 10 March 2009]; Steven Henry Madoff, 'Reflecting on an Ordeal That Was Also Art,' *The New York Times* 28 November (2002), <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/28/arts/reflecting-on-an-ordeal-that-was-also-art.html> [Accessed 10 March 2009]; and Catherine Saint Louis, 'What Were They Thinking: The Way We Live Now,' *New York Times Magazine* 15 December (2002), <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-12-15-02-what-they-were-thinking.html> [Accessed 10 March 2009].

[28] 'One,' *Sex and the City*, HBO, Season 6, Episode 86, (2003) <http://www.hbo.com/city/episode/season6/episode86.shtml> [accessed 15 April 2009].

study I begin with an overview of Abramović's life and artistic practices.

**Embodied Practices**

Marina Abramović was born in communist controlled Yugoslavia in 1946. Abramović's personal history includes family members devoted to both the religious and the political extremes of the spectrum: her mother was a tireless worker for the CPY and was the Director of the Museum of Art and Revolution, her father was also a decorated member of the party and her maternal grandfather was a patriarch of the Orthodox church murdered for his beliefs who later received sainthood. Yugoslavia at this time was not the most encouraging environment for a young artist, but Abramović had been exposed to art practices through her mother's work at the musuem, and she had been taken to every Venice Biennale from the age of twelve.[29] University programmes were open enough that Abramović was able to study art and to experiment with forms through installations and collaborations with other artists. The state did not make continuing in this direction easy:

> I was part of a circle of artists who were strongly engaged in performance, but the support structure never materialized. Nothing happened. We were deeply engaged and by then we certainly knew about people on the outside….But there was no support mechanism for us to continue….In the end, we felt totally isolated in that this type of work was still not accepted in that society.[30]

Artists were marginalised through the state apparatus that provided them funding and then only provided opportunities to work in the state controlled academies.

Marina Abramović's first artistic explorations in the 1960s were in painting and drawing. It was not until Abramović started to work with

[29] Marina Abramović and Nancy Spector, 'Marina Abramović Interviewed by Nancy Spector', *7 Easy Pieces* (Milan: Charta, 2007), pp. 13-31 (p. 15).
[30] Abramović and Spector, p. 15.

installations while at university that she found the direction for her art which she continues to pursue. From 1965-70 she attended the Academy of Fine Arts, Belgrade where she created her first installations. In the early 1970s Abramović's approach shifted to primarily using her body. In 1976 she left her teaching position in Novi Sad and moved to Amsterdam. Her performance has taken on many incarnations since then, the most well known of which was her collaborative work from 1976 to 1988 with German artist Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen). Their explorations were physical, often pushing the limits of embodied practice and stressing endurance. The working relationship ended at the conclusion of their piece *The Lovers* in 1988 when they walked across the Great Wall of China, starting at opposite ends and meeting after ninety days. Their parting, after this meeting, led to Abramović exhibiting and performing as a solo artist.

Throughout the walk Abramović had felt a connection with the elements and minerals which are found along the wall, from amethyst and quartz to wood and metal. Within a year of returning from this walk she was creating what she calls 'Transitory Objects,' incorporating the elements and minerals, primarily in the form of furniture; chairs, beds and pillows (some of these appear in the piece *The House With the Ocean View*). From 1990 to 2005 a full range of projects, from staging her life in a 'show' which was conceived to be performed in a theatre (*Biography*),[31] to a permanent outdoor display of mineral pillows in Japan, to publishing books, to solo and group performances have kept her body of work growing.

Among her most famous pieces are two in which themes from her upbringing are clearly present. *Balkan Baroque,* for which she received the

[31] This show is documented in the book *Marina Abramović: Biography*, by Marina Abramović with Charles Atlas (Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz, 1994).

Golden Lion Award, 1st Prize, was presented at the Venice Biennale in 1997. In this piece Abramović sat in a room full of fresh beef bones and cleaned them while singing folk songs from her childhood.

> For twenty years Abramović has made reference to the Yugoslavia she left behind in the early '70s, but none so forcefully as her most recent performances *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995) and *Balkan Baroque* (1997). Wearing a long white shift and seated in a dank, poorly lit basement (in a New York gallery in *Cleaning*, and in a cellar in *Balkan* for the '97 Venice Biennale) Abramović scrubbed endlessly at massive cowbones, removing the grit and blood with a large scrubbing brush dipped regularly into a large pail of water at her knees. Increasingly bloody and distraught, Abramović, who began the process as a kind of "religious rejuvenating ritual," was soon mesmerized and overwhelmed by the horror of her task. The metaphor for ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was lost on none who observed the artist sink uncontrollably into deep sadness as the work progressed. Weeping and exhausted, Abramović created an unforgettable image of grief for her times.[32]

The collapse of Yugoslavia and the fall into war in the 1990s was a situation which Abramović felt compelled to address through this work, and *Balkan Baroque* was compared to religious ritual by many who were present. While this piece was constructed in response to a specific situation, her most recent performances look to her personal artistic past included the reworking of the well-known *Thomas Lips* (1975).

The reworked version was presented as part of *Seven Easy Pieces* and was performed at The Solomen R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 9-15 November, 2005. *Seven Easy Pieces* consisted of seven performances over seven nights; six were previously performed – five from other artists and one of her own. The seventh piece was newly devised to be part of the exhibition. *Thomas Lips* was presented on the sixth night. In the original *Thomas Lips*, which lasted no more than an hour, Abramović ate a kilogram of honey with a spoon, drank a bottle of

[32] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 1960* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), p. 114.

red wine, broke the wine glass in her hand, cut a five pointed star on her stomach with a razor blade, whipped herself until she felt no pain, laid down on a cross made of blocks of ice and put a heater over her cut stomach causing the wound to bleed more.

In the version performed in 2005 the duration of the performance was seven hours so it was no longer practical to break a glass or to cut the entire star at once. Instead parts of the piece were repeated throughout the seven hours including the eating of the honey, drinking of the wine and cutting of the star. New aspects were also added including Abramović donning the hiking boots she wore, and holding the walking stick she used, on the Great Wall of China. She also wore her mother's partisan cap from 1941 which was decorated with the communist five pointed star and sang a song from her childhood.

On 13 October, 2006 Abramović delivered a talk, at the *Frieze Art Fair* in London, titled 'Seven Easy Pieces or How to Perform,' which focussed on the history of performance art and her performance at the Guggenheim Museum. Abramović commented on her decisions to change *Thomas Lips* and explained that the star cut into her body, the ice cross, as well as other aspects, were included because of the presence of both the religious and political influences in her life: "[the] whole piece was very much to do with the religious context of Orthodoxy and Communism together."[33] The influence of communist Yugoslavia, its political, religious and artistic policies on her art is not insignificant; implicit as well as explicit references surface in much of her work: "I had so much to do with the Russian culture as a young [person], that was the culture we were in, [...] to really understand the whole Russian culture and

[33] Marina Abramović, 'Seven Easy Pieces or How to Perform', *Frieze Art Fair* (2006) <http://www.friezefoundation.org/talks/category/year_2006/> [accessed 9 April 2009] transcribed by Megan Macdonald.

literature was a big influence on me."[34] It is important to note that Abramović's recent work uses this range of influences in an overt way. She made a point of telling the audience at *Frieze* that she had wanted to perform at the Guggenheim because she identified the performance space in that building as a spiritual space:[35]

> Look at the spiral [in the Guggenheim]. Why did I wait fifteen years? I didn't want any other building. It's amazing. To me, it was the only place I could think of, this spiral with its different vantage points. […] There are two kinds of spaces that produce energy: the spiral and the pyramid. I think it's interesting how in the beginning of this project, we started by thinking of very complicated stage designs, and then at the end we built a simple circular podium and that's it….This simple structure was transformed each night for each piece until in the end, the circle was literally elevated towards the spiral, towards the spiritual.[36]

Abramović thinks of the spiritual in relation to every aspect of the performance from the framing provided by the architecture to the content. While she does not impose one reading onto the work, she provides background information for the pieces and audience participants make their own connections by reading the program and website.

As I researched Abramović's work it became clear that everyone who wrote mentioned the spiritual nature of her work and listed many possible influences. It was surprising to me that there were few references to and no discussions of Christian practices, except for the information about her grandfather. Abramović makes clear and explicit references to spiritual themes in her work including her experiences with Australian Aborigine practices, Tibetan Buddhism and Sufi rites.

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[34] Marina Abramović, *Frieze Art Fair*, transcribed by Megan Macdonald.
[35] She said that the spiral (the part of the museum in which she performed was a large spiral spanning the height of the museum so the audience could view the performance from many heights and angles) was a spiritually relevant metaphor. Marina Abramović, *Frieze Art Fair*, transcribed and paraphrased by Megan Macdonald.
[36] Abramovic and Spector, p. 30.

> Yes, when I was in Tibet, or when I lived among the Aborigines in Australia, or when I learnt some of the Sufi rites, I understood that these cultures have a long tradition of techniques of meditation which lead the body to a borderline state that allows us to make a mental leap to enter different dimensions of existence and to eliminate the fear of pain, death or the limitation of the body.[37]

Abramović references other traditions and what she has learned from them, but does not claim to be a student of these practices. Other writers almost exclusively associate Non-Western practices with her work. Rarely mentioned by others are the influences of her mother who worked for a museum (or other family members who were religious), Orthodox Christianity, Yugoslavian communism or other Western practices.[38] When these are mentioned it is almost always as background information and does not inform the analysis of the work. Yet, as can be seen from the description and Abramović's account of *Thomas Lips*, she considers the piece to be spiritual performance as well as intertwined with her own experiences of spiritual practices from her childhood.

While Abramović mentions these practices, she generally does not

[37] Marina Abramović in conversation with Dobrila Denegril in *Marina Abramović: Performing Body* (Milan: Charta, 1998), p. 18.

[38] One of the few articles to engage with Christianity and Abramović's work is an article by Maureen Turim, 'Marina Abramović's Perception: Stresses on the Body and Psyche in Installation Art,' *Camera Obscura*, 54.18 (2003), 99-116. Turim uses film, psychoanalysis and feminist models of analysis to discuss the work. Her reference to Christianity is part of her argument for masochistic tendencies in Abramović's work but not as a relevant spiritual practice. As well Turim incorrectly states that Abramović is Jewish and uses this false information to posit Abramović as an outsider to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions and thus that her work is somehow a reaction to these practices, but in no way part of the tradition. This results in a flawed analysis, as seen in this quotation from the article: "I wish to suggest that the masochistic aspects of Abramović's performances take on a heritage of Christian and particularly Eastern Orthodox moral masochism, along with any traditional links this may have to a feminine position. When such acts are performed or represented by a contemporary woman artist, when they are seen in relationship to early performance art that has been linked to masochism by Kathy O'Dellin her *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's*, it seems that what emerges is an active intervention into the representation and acting-out of the submissive subject. As a Jew who was raised in a Communist country and as a modern woman of Europe, Abramović less partakes of the traditions of moral masochism directly than interacts with them as an outsider. The artist confronts the limits comprised by our expectations of pleasure in aesthetic experiences of theatre and art. She tests those limits as a collective, ritual act in which audience reaction becomes very much an element of meaning within the work" (p. 103). I do not disagree with the observation that the audience become part of meaning making in the performance, but I do not agree with Turim's assessment of why Abramović creates such pieces.

affiliate herself with any one practice. The only exception to this is Tibetan Buddhism:

> Over the years I have turned to a spiritual search that is closer to the techniques of Tibetan Buddhism than to the more mental practice of Japanese Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism has an imaginary world that I would define as almost Baroque. It is precisely this Baroque, understood as a wealth of contradictory and opposing states and of images, that I examine in my own work.[39]

Even in this quotation Abramović does not claim to be a member of a religion or to have committed to regular practice. Instead she relates aspects of the practice of Buddhism to her artistic/performance practices. She does not say that she is a Buddhist, just that her own spiritual activities have something in common with Buddhism. As if to prevent being identified with a specific type of practice, Abramović also states that she cannot follow any discipline for longer than the preparation for a performance piece demands:

> I am unable to do anything regularly. I always do things as part of a project. If I have in my mind that I have to do something, then I generate an enormous discipline and willpower and I get into the space I have to enter to make the performance. But it is impossible for me to do something like wake up every morning at six to run, as people do. I like to make rules and change them all the time. Even when I buy the milk in Amsterdam, I find new ways to go around the canal. The idea of habits, of discipline—there is something within me that can't function that way.[40]

This explanation of her personal relationship to the practices that she uses to make work makes it clear that Abramović draws from many sources when she is creating. To associate her work with only a few practices is questionable, especially when neither she nor the critics who write about her work are from the cultures where these spiritual paths are typical. In other words, while there is no reason not to discuss how various practices are evident in Abramović's work,

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[39] Denegril, p. 22.
[40] Laurie Anderson, 'Marina Abromovic', *Bomb Magazine*, 84 (2003), <http://www.bombsite.com/issues/84/articles/2561> [accessed 30 March 2009].

there is also no reason to leave out the dominant practices of the cultural tradition – the Christian tradition – in which both the writers and Abramović live.

**Analysing Documentation**

All of my exposure to Abramović's work is from reading articles and interviews and looking at photographs. I have not purposefully avoided live performances; from early 2004 to 2009 Abramović has not performed in the UK. My first opportunity to see her was at the *Frieze Art Fair* in London, October 2006. At the event Marina Abramović was introduced and then took the stage where she talked and showed images and video clips for close to two hours. It proved hard to remain impassive and disconnected from the woman talking on stage. She spoke with authority and humour about performance art and her work.

While she was entertaining and at times provocative – making claims about what constitutes good art – it was obvious that she was not 'performing.' So many of the articles about her speak of her ability to transform a situation with her presence. While those listening to the lecture were clearly paying attention, there was no obvious 'energy exchange' taking place. Yet, this talk did influence my perception of her performance persona. In contrast with the last chapter in which I described an series of events at which I was present, this chapter is a reading of documentation of performances available through books and articles. Critical literature about performance is an important topic in this dissertation because of how it is impacted by the methodologies used by performance academics.

On some level all the writing that is produced in relation to a performance constitutes a form of documentation of the event. The tone of this writing can

vary greatly and the influence of such discourses is a problematic topic in performance studies as Susan Melrose explains:

> From this point of view what is at stake, from the perspectives of professional performance making, is what writing in certain genres and registers, in particular sites, performs upon the body (so to speak) of complex, mixed-mode, multi-participant professional practices. It is licensed to perform this in the university, with a confidence and an authority which *ontologise* in terms of spectator experience – as though the writing were naming 'the show itself'.[41]

Such critical writing does not simply explain or discuss but *acts*, and in that action defines the performance, such that all those who read the writing must by necessity rely on the written word for their understanding.

Critical discourses control the reception of information about the event for both those who were there and those who read about it later, as Amelia Jones points out, "even for those events I also experienced "in the flesh"; I view these through the memory screen, and they become documentary in their own right."[42] All subsequent writing is affected as documentation, to use Jones' word, and sets out what can and cannot be understood about the work.[43] All those who were not present at the original have to 'make do' with the personal choices and interests of those who were.

Abramović mentioned an example of how the accumulating documents affect the reception and understanding of a piece of work in her *Frieze* talk. The television show *Sex in the City* had used her set from *The House With the Ocean*

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[41] Susan Melrose, ''Constitutive Ambiguities': Writing professional or expert performance practices, and the Théâtre du Soleil, Paris,' in *Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion*, ed. by Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 120-135 (p. 125). [Original emphasis.]
[42] Amelia Jones, 'Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal*, Winter (1997), 11-18 (p. 12).
[43] Peggy Phelan's theories about how performance criticism and writing function have been influential within the field of Performance Studies. In 'The Ontology of Performance' she makes the case for the importance of the person who documents, as well as for the writing to go beyond simply retelling the actions of the performance. Peggy Phelan, 'The Ontology of Performance', in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 146-166 (pp. 147, 149).

*View* for an episode and hired an actress to play Abramović.[44] In the episode a discussion of the piece between two main characters and a fictional well-known artist revealed much about the influence such documentation can have. One character reacted to Abramović's work with praise saying that it took art and performance to a whole new level and that it was 'profound.' While the other character took an opposing view and critiqued the premise of the work saying that the woman in the piece was just like hundreds of other women in New York, trying not to eat and waiting for a man to call on a Friday night. Both comments were made by main characters in the series, but the second comment carried more weight as it was made by the character who narrates the episodes.

Through its appearance in the episode, the ways in which the work and the discourses around it circulate in a wider culture were highlighted. What appeared on television became the definitive version of the performance. The critiques presented in the show were part of shaping the work and potential future responses to performance art. While two differing positions were shown, the opinion which made light of the work with humour was no doubt most easily understood by many viewers. The more serious critique of issues arising from the performance in the show was undermined by the main character's flippant comments. As the gallery and Abramović allowed the use of the set, this is not a defense of Abramović's piece, but an example of the potential power of documentation to influence understandings of the piece by those who rely on documentation.[45]

One of Abramović's main comments about the show was that the actress

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[44] I discuss this piece in detail later. Briefly, Abramović lived in a gallery in New York City for 12 days, did not talk, write, eat or drink, except water, and invited the public in to have an 'energy exchange' with her.

[45] For more on this topic see Philip Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ*, 84 (2006), 1-10.

looked nothing like her and was 'ugly.' While this elicited laughs from the audience at *Frieze*, it highlights the more serious point of who decides what a performance is about and how it should be presented. In the episode the actress playing Abramović had very messy hair and was wearing quite a bit of makeup. During the original performance Abramović showered up to three times a day, which left her hair quite controlled, and did not wear any makeup. The documentation done by the television show was incomplete and inaccurate. The choices made in this presentation of the work point to other agendas than those which were of interest to Abramović.

The preoccupations of the television industry are not of concern here, but the ways in which performance is theorised by those who document it is; the person who creates the documentation, whether in the form of a photograph or an article, always has a point of view.[46] Abramović is clear about how she perceives her work and how it should be understood by others. Academics and artists are responsible for shaping interpretations and analyses by which the work and its documentation is understood. We have already seen how methodologies such as the participant-observer method can sometimes lead to unanticipated biases. Religious/spiritual points of view can equally influence critical discourses in unanticipated ways. I return to this idea at the end of the chapter in a detailed analysis of articles about Abramović's pieces.

In Chapters 1 and 2 anthropological methodologies were discussed at length and their influence on the field of performance studies was emphasised. These methods are used alongside other theoretical models in this

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[46] Of course, any photograph, video or description will necessarily be tied to a point of view, but performance scholars rely on the accuracy of such details such as colour, shape, size, positioning and in the case of descriptions, what it felt like during the performance. Individual, personal opinions are not considered to be inaccurate.

interdisciplinary field. A survey of writing on performance art since the 1980s reveals a variety of methods and approaches. Books such as Richard Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), Adrian Heathfield's *Live: Art and Performance* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), Victor Tuner's From *Ritual to Theatre* (New York: PAJ, 1982), Marvin Carlson's *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), and RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* ( London: Thames and Hudson, 1988) and *Performance: Live Art Since 1960*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), all position performance as interdisciplinary with historical roots in art practices as well as philosophy and theory.[47]

When performance art and performance studies were in their inception, practitioners and academics alike were looking beyond Western theatrical traditions for forms which would add depth and substance to both the performances and the analyses. Performance traditions have never existed in a vacuum and the influences that we have been discussing from the beginning of this dissertation are all evident in academic research in theatre and performance.[48] From an emphasis on representational analyses to the framing of other cultures as the 'exotic' other, theatre and performance studies demonstrate Western modes of thinking. Many of the cultures from which these forms were borrowed have more fluid categories to describe artistic and religious expression than in the West where dance, drama, theatre, art, music, ritual, etc., are often kept strictly apart. From Indian dance drama such as Kathakali or Baratanatyam, to African tribal

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[47] Theories which are often used in performance analysis, include: feminist theory, cultural theory, semiotics, historiography and others. See also: Campbell, Patrick, ed., *Analysing Performance: A Critical Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) and Alice Rayner, *To Act, To Do, To Perform: Drama and the Phenomenology of Action* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[48] For more on this see *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. by Patrice Pavis, (London: Routledge, 1996).

rituals and Native North American rituals, other cultural forms put a different focus put on the relationship between art and belief. Or to put it another way, they allow for interplay between religion and spirituality, on the one hand, and cultural expressions of art, on the other, in a way that Western practice generally does not, at least not since the emergence of art as a supposedly autonomous category.

Analysing such forms proved difficult for researchers using traditional Western theatre methods with their more limited focus as to what constituted art. Theatre practitioners realised that anthropology, which had been analysing the rituals of 'foreign' cultures since the nineteenth century, often included aspects of what they were interested in understanding; e.g., anthropologists had been applying the term ritual to practices which incorporated dance, drama and music, etc. The anthropologists had developed methods, vocabulary and theories to account for the rituals (religious or not) they observed and in which they, at times, participated. The participant-observer method discussed in Chapter 2 is perhaps the most well known and widely used in performance studies. Theatre practitioners identified that these already existent methods would prove useful to the study of rituals from a theatre/drama perspective, and the use of the methodologies within performance studies has had far reaching effects.

However, as we have already discussed in the earlier section on Fenella Cannell's research, religious/spiritual aspects of ritual were often discounted. If addressed at all, the religious elements were compared with Christianity as the 'known' against which all other occurrences could be measured:

> What travellers and missionaries first discovered when they travelled to India, or the South Seas, or Africa were 'rituals', that is acts of worship which could be observed and described in journals, but which, to the outsider, appeared totally meaningless and bizarre…There were essentially two responses to these activities that went on to provide the origins

> of the distinction between 'ritual' and 'worship'. Either the acts were considered as something different from, and entirely other than, Christian worship (especially as understood by the Protestant missions) and were therefore defined as 'ritual', or they were of the same kind as Christian worship but were wrongly focused, and were therefore defined as 'worship', but as 'wrong' worship.[49]

Rituals did not fit the structures used in the West and proved difficult to describe or explain, as we have already seen in Pouillon's example of the Dangaleat. A metaphysical approach to belief was the norm. The over simplification of ritual into categories of 'right' and 'wrong' has had far reaching implications such that, as Martin Stringer explains, the word ritual "still has too many overtones of the dancing savages to be a term which ordinary Christians would be happy to use of their everyday worship."[50]

This referencing of Christian ritual as the 'true' or 'right' ritual has had a profound effect on analyses of ritual, which have been uncritically used in performance studies as well. The problem with this for performance studies is that the methodologies Cannell claims must be re-examined because of their inherently Christian foundations have been accepted as both secular and unbiased. Yet they are really neither and their application in performance studies results in biased accounts of performances. Little has been done from within the field of performance studies to question this inheritance and perhaps because anthropology was not advocating a complete reassessment it was not seen as necessary.[51]

Christian practices have been under-researched and non-Christian

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[49] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 22.
[50] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 38.
[51] Some might say that this problem only affects those who study ritual or other cultural performance styles. I would argue that at the very least many performance scholars use the participant/observer method when describing performance, or the work of a company or performer, and this methodology is not as unbiased and free from the trappings of its Christian history as it might seem.

practices have been subjected to analyses that presuppose Christian logics. In both instances, this limits the capacity of the analysis to engage properly with certain kinds of performance material. As Cannell's and other anthropologist's work is now actively engaged in unearthing and discussing the Christian roots of the discipline, perhaps the results of this work will start to be taken into account within performance studies. This new research cannot but benefit the study of religious and spiritual practices for both disciplines.

The result of this disciplinary blindness to Christian practice is that writers reach to other religious practices for examples. Comparisons are made which seem reasonable, but upon closer inspection prove problematic. In this next section I introduce and examine two practices which are often used in relation to Abramovic's work, but which I argue, should not be (or at least not without significant qualification). These help to demonstrate how the blindness to the role of Christian practices on Western performance operates in the critical discourse around her work.

### SHAMANISM, NEW AGE AND VISUAL ART

Of the many practices which are mentioned in relation to Abramović's work shamanism and New Age are particularly problematic: they are consistently employed by performance scholars and yet are never explained. Other practices, such as Buddhism, are also mentioned, but where Buddhism is seen as a world religion, shamanism and New Age are practices that many diverse groups and individuals around the world follow. Their use in critical discourse is generally as shorthand and this is problematic for the assumptions that go with it as well as for the historical and background information that is covered over by such uncritical

reference.

Shamanism and New Age are consistently compared with Abramović's performances and not without reason. The obvious connection between Abramović's work and the practice of shamanism is her role as a facilitator of audience/participant experience. The major similarities with New Age practices are her incorporation of materials for their supposedly spiritual potential (including the stereotypical use of minerals and natural elements such as wood and metal) and the refusal to name any one practice as formative of her own spirituality. There are, however, more subtle points of comparison and criticism and it is these that will be examined in what follows.

### Shamanism

Theatre and ritual are closely linked, at least this has been the common claim, as David George explains: "Ritual has been a popular explanation for the otherwise puzzling fact that theatre clearly originated at different times and in different places that had no connection to each other; hence it seems to invite some transcultural theory of unitary origin."[52] Origin theories take different trajectories, but many link the shaman with the actor arguing that a shaman, "must have derived from somewhere the value of dressing up, the efficacy of assuming another persona; he must have either learned or been born with that ability and to have noted it at work all around him."[53] Such examples link 'old' cultural practices with theatre as if the age of the tradition somehow lends it more credibility as an art form.

[52]David George, 'On Origins: Behind the Rituals', *Performance Research: On Ritual*, 3.3 (1998), 1-14 (p. 1).
[53] George, p. 1. "Acting (or, more strictly speaking, performing) is older than shamanism – which depends on it."

Rachel Karafistan is a theatre practitioner who seeks to legitimate the comparison of theatrical practice with the shaman. Karafistan's article,''The Spirits Wouldn't Let Me Be Anything Else': Shamanic Dimensions in Theatre Practice Today,' argues that the global existence of shamanic practice points to an "evolution" from shaman to actor. Karafistan writes, "[i]t is possible for all cultures to trace a tribal, shamanic heritage."[54] Indeed, for those who study ritual this is an oft repeated truism.[55] Most writing on shamanism focuses either on the history and possible roots of the shaman, or addresses specific contemporary case studies of shamans through the field of anthropology or various branches of medicine.[56] George and Karafistan both write from a performance perspective and their articles highlight some inherent problems with easy comparisons between different sorts of cultural performance.

It is clear from Karafistan's article why the term would be appealing to performance academics (as much theatre is touted as spiritual), but it is equally clear that such an uncritical usage is also deeply problematic. Karafistan explains the spiritual elements of shamanism, as she understands them:

> The work of shamans across cultures is both fragmented and often culturally specific. However, there are also striking similarities between shamanic practices and ceremonies across regions that have never encountered one another. One general feature of most shamanic cultures is that the shaman has the ability to transport his soul out of his body and travel to other parts of the cosmos, to the upper and lower regions. He/she is also able to enter altered state [sic] of consciousness and be able to control these states and communicate with spirits whilst in trance. The shaman has a duty to serve his/her community, often at the risk of their sanity. The universality of shamanism is an indicator of one of its primary functions, as a healing source in its society.[57]

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[54] Rachel Karafistan, ''The Spirits Wouldn't Let Me Be Anything Else': Shamanic Dimensions in Theatre Practice Today,' in *New Theatre Quarterly*, 19: 2 (May 2003), 150-168 (p. 151).
[55] For examples of work that discusses this idea see *Performance Research: On Ritual*, 3.3 (1998).
[56] Examples of ethnographic research which focus on shamanism include Arne Røkkum's, *Nature, Ritual and Society in Japan's Ryukyu Islands* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).
[57] Karafistan, p. 151.

The universality that Karafistan claims for shamanism is actually a discursive construct, produced by the decision to apply the term 'shaman' to anyone who can 'heal.' This broad definition of shamanism is used at the beginning of the article and establishes two ideas which become central to her argument; that all shamanic expression has similarities and that shamanism is universal in its function within society. The next step in her reasoning is to conclude that shamanism is therefore necessary; because it appears in all cultures it must also be an 'original' form of expression.

Her next discursive move is to connect specific theatre practices with shamanism. Among the most important, in her opinion, is Eugenio Barba's method which is called Theatre Anthropology. Here she quotes from Barba to describe the kind of theatre she associates with shamanism. This is a style of theatre that,

> lives on the fringes, often outside or on the outskirts of the centres and capitals of culture. It is a theatre created by people who have seldom undergone a traditional theatrical education and therefore are not recognized as professionals. But they are not amateurs. Their entire day is filled with theatrical experience, sometimes by what they call training, or by the preparation of performances for which they must fight to find an audience.[58]

While Barba uses the word theatre, he is defining an alternative style of performance. Some of the practitioners Barba had in mind and whom Karafistan references are Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Richard Schechner, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Joseph Chaikin. All of these artists produced "new forms" and "avant-garde" theatre developed with the influence of what Christopher Innes calls "primitive drama styles."[59] Barba and Karafistan use the word primitive to indicate that there is value in older forms because they are more

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[58] Eugenio Barba quoted in Karafistan, pp. 150-151.
[59] Christoper Innes quoted in Karafistan, p. 154.

authentic, original. It is a desirable quality to achieve because the "primitive" is simultaneously other than what is currently known yet still part of the collective memory of society.

The usefulness of this approach is that makes a case for the value and authenticity of an artist's work. However, simply because work was "primitive" or seems to have been because of photographs that exist is not enough of a reason to label it shamanistic or the performers shamans. Abramović addressed this issue in her 2006 talk at *Frieze* in relation to producing performance art in the early 1970s. While arguing against nostalgia, she says that it was hard work, attracted few audience members, and took place in strange and difficult venues:

> You know, in the 70s, even if we always are nostalgic, thinking how good a time it was, it was not such a good time. But we think about it as a good time because all we have seen from the 70s is some photographs – black and white with a lot of damage. So they look really ancient, anthropological material, very pleasing to the eye. We are also confronted with video material with bad sound, bad image, too long. And then we have the stories and the witnesses. [...] And it is like almost everybody saw something in the 70s. But it is not true at all because in the 70s we hardly had any public or very little. And there were very few people, sometimes friends you knew or actually some passers-by, who came in by accident and saw the piece. We are talking about the early 70s, later on it starts being different.[60]

Abramović's early work is often cited for its demands on the body, her incorporation of audience members as participants, and her ability to change her state of consciousness. These aspects fit with what George and Karafistan describe as shamanic, but as Abramović says, performances need to be examined in context, not just through nostalgia or hearsay.

Theatre or performance that can lay claim to primitive, original and universal qualities is validated as useful, necessary and important. Karafistan spells it out thus: "What the performance of the shaman and [this] theatre has in

[60] Abramović, *Frieze Art Fair* (2006), transcribed by Megan Macdonald.

common is that, without the use of arduous narrative, they both succeed in appealing to something deeper and primal within their audiences."[61] This appeal to the depths of emotion is another way Karafistan tries to argue for the importance of shamanistic work not only in the theatre but in every culture. This is unfortunately the common level of critique and rhetoric often used by those who seek to justify the power of theatre. Karafistan's article reaches for historical data to prove the relevance of theatrical practices as more than just entertainment.

In order to convince the reader Karafistan goes further and claims that theatre is shamanism: "while the shaman of old was the director, designer, and actor of his/her performance, these roles (and often many more besides) have now become fragmented and delegated – and constitute what we now call theatre."[62] Following this logic theatre is part of a greater lineage which shares its inception with important and necessary forms of universal expression. Thus contemporary comparisons of Abramović to a shaman do not just compare her to a form of spiritual practice, but claim for her work a history and logic which are fundamental to human expression. This is clearly simplistic reasoning, but it is often accepted as an argument.

Some of Abramović's descriptions of aspects of her work do use terms similar to that of the shaman, but this is at best a superficial comparison. It does not 'prove' anything substantial about the work. I do not want to say that it is unreasonable to find similarities between practices, but these always need to be properly contextualised. The majority of work that uses 'shaman' or 'shamanistic' in relation to theatre or performance does so with no explanation as to the critical implications of the comparison.

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[61] Karafistan, p. 153.
[62] Karafistan, p. 152.

**New Age**

Another highly problematic term with spiritual associations is New Age. There is much debate about New Age religion is, if it is indeed a religion at all. Michael York writes:

> The perplexity involved in attempting to understand New Age phenomena, however, has divided practitioners and scholars alike. There is no general consensus over what exactly New Age is, whether it is a movement or not, whether a congeries of separate movements, whether a cultural phenomenon, a cultural emblem, a codeword for post-1960s popular religion, a 'fake' etic formulation/projection, or even a genuine spirituality.[63]

Fully aware that there is no agreement on terms or titles within the field of Alternative Spiritualities, I have chosen to use the definitions of Wouter J. Hanegraaff for the historical perspective they afford. His framework is theoretical, focusing on the ideas behind New Age as they fit into the larger field of Western Esotericism.[64] He uses specific understandings of "religion – religions – and spiritualities"[65] to clarify New Age:

> Religion [is] any symbolic system which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of

[63] Michael York, 'Wanting to Have Your New Age Cake and Eat It Too', *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*, 1 (2005), 15-34, (p.17).

[64] "The modern study of Western esotericism…uses the term very differently: as referring to a number of specific currents and traditions from Antiquity to the present, which can be shown to share certain "family characteristics" and are historically related. These currents include gnosticism and hermetism in antiquity, the so-called "occult sciences" (esp. astrology, alchemy and magic), the hermetic revival of the Renaissance and the emergence of a new "occulta philosophia", Christian kabbalah, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, Christian theosophy, Illuminism, 19th-century occultism, and various related currents up to and including the New Age movement." Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence of New Age Religion: On the substance of ghosts and the use of concepts', *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*, 1 (2005), 35-58, (pp. 38-39). Another area that is related to this is that of the self-help book where similar rhetoric to that used by Abramović and those who write about her work can be found. An example can be found in, Inger Askehave, 'If Language is a Game - These are the Rules: A Search into the Rhetoric of the Spiritual Self-Help Book *If Life is a Game - These are the Rules*,' *Discourse Society*, 15.1 (2004), 5-31.

[65] Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence', p. 43.

> meaning.[66]
>
> Spiritualities, in contrast, can be defined as any human practice that maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the individual manipulation of symbolic systems.[67]
>
> We can speak of *a* religion if the symbolic system I just referred to is embodied in a social institution. [...] New Age, according to this approach, is not *a* religion because it is not embodied in a social institution. It does, however, qualify as "religion", and it manifests itself as a multiplicity of individual "spiritualities".[68]

While the definitions are broad and leave room for many types of symbolic systems to qualify as 'religion' or 'spiritualities' it is clear that the defining difference between, for example, Christianity and New Age is whether symbolic systems are manipulated by institutions or individuals. Christianity would therefore be defined as *a* religion. Those who practice it could also be involved in Christian spiritualities where the individual manipulates the symbolic systems outside of the institutional framework. There need be no attempt to change institutional Christian practice in so doing. The same would be true for any practitioner of any religion. It is not that the former system (institutionalized religion) is static while the later (spiritualities) is fluid, as religions do shift over time, but it is the way those systems change that is important. However, there is a difference between Christian or Jewish practices and New Age spiritualities. Hanegraaff clarifies further:

> The crucial characteristic of New Age religion, I suggest, is that it consists of a complex of spiritualities which are no longer embedded in any religion — as was the case with all spiritualities from the past — but

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[66] Hanegraaff explains the origin for this definition in footnote 13 (this was already mentioned in the Introduction): "This is a critical reformulation of the famous definition proposed by Clifford Geertz in 1966 ('Religion as a Cultural System,' 'Religion as a Cultural System,' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 87-125)." Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion and Secularization: Examining the Phenomenal Popularity of Esoteric Spiritualities and Literature in Contemporary Western Culture and Society', *Numen-International Review For the History of Religions*, 47.3 (2000), 288-312), p. 295.

[67] Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence', p. 42.

[68] Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence', p. 42. [My emphasis.]

> directly in secular culture itself. All manifestations of New Age religion, without exception, are based upon what I have called an "individual manipulation of existing symbolic systems". In this way, new syntheses are continually being created, providing the very thing which religion has always provided: the possibility for ritually maintaining contact with a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning, in terms of which people give sense to their experiences in daily life.[69]

New Age is a product of contemporary secular culture in the West where for the first time in history individuals are choosing which symbols, both secular and religious, to include and manipulate in relation to spiritual life.[70] The "meta-empirical framework" which each person constructs in order to understand and mediate the world around them is thus created with the use of any and all symbols which the individual finds meaningful to their experience. Aspects of institutionalized religion may be included in this selection especially when the individual was raised within such a system.

The explanations provided by Hanegraaff are ways to understand the ideas behind New Age practice, not ways to explain the reasons behind each individual's manipulation of the chosen symbols. Based on these alone Abramović's work fits the framework of New Age; she does create symbolic systems which she associates with spiritual truths and then manipulates for her own purposes. She both provides symbols for others to manipulate according to her instructions and performs with the systems herself; manipulating the symbols in front of and with 'participants.'

Abramović, however, consistently rejects any comparison of her work with New Age: "Because I use minerals, some people label this work New Age. I

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[69] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 303-304.

[70] "If the processes of secularisation…are taken seriously, we find that there is an enormous difference between Western esotericism in the pre-Enlightenment period and the profoundly secularised kinds of esotericism found in New Age. New Age cannot be adequately understood if we do not see it as the outcome of complex processes of secularisation within the much wider domain of Western esotericism. This is an approach which, obviously, implies that the two terms are not conflated." Hanegraaff, 'Spectral Evidence', p. 39.

definitely do not like to be related to this, because my work is really about something else."[71] This raises the question: How are academics and other writers using this term such that she refuses the comparison?

It is not possible to know exactly why a given writer chooses New Age as a comparison for Abramović's work. It is, however, possible to investigate known assumptions about New Age and the inherent implications of its use. As Hanegraaff's definitions show, New Age thinking is part of a larger cultural shift where the individual (as the manipulator of symbolic symbols) is at the centre of the meta-narrative traditionally held in place by larger religious institutions. New Age is not regulated, nor is its inclusivity purposeful; a label has been applied to a set of practices that is constantly expanding, no one has tried to make it thus. Individuals choose to be associated with the term; New Age practices are not contained by an institution and cannot actively seek new members. As such, Abramović's desire to distance herself from New Age does not eliminate the similarities that cause the comparisons but it does change how those comparisons can be interpreted. When others make this comparison with her work it can only be taken as highlighting the social trend to acknowledge New Age.

Abramović's refutation of New Age means that authors cannot claim that she engages with a purposeful application of practices or methods. Artists are influenced by their surrounding culture and New Age ideas and language are pervasive – it would be hard for most people to deny having heard of New Age, but this does not mean that any similarity automatically proves an influence. In the same way that artists throughout the ages have mirrored societal changes Abramović's art may not aim to endorse popular religion and yet still be in line

[71] Marina Abramović in 'Elevating the Public: In Conversation with Adrian Heathfield', in *Live*, ed.by Adrian Heathfield (London: Tate, 2004), pp. 144-151 (p. 147).

with some of its developments. Writers who use the term New Age need to qualify or explain its use in relation to her work.

I want to highlight two commonly held assumptions about New Age which would lead writers to use it as a form of shorthand in relation to Abramović's work: New Age and performance art can both be linked to an historical moment, and New Age is understood as an alternative to Western culture and institutionalized religion. Both of these have an element of truth, but are ultimately superficial versions of what New Age really represents. New Age is generally understood as either very old or as having come into existence in the 1960s. The 'very old' theory comes about through the idea that there is "an inner core of true spirituality...behind the outer surface of all religious traditions, and that the knowledge of it has been kept alive by secret traditions throughout the ages."[72] Those who follow this thinking believe that New Age practitioners are privy to these traditions and have 'inherited' the secret knowledge. All traditions are linked through this kind of thinking which often adopts the word 'holistic.' New Age is thus called a universal religious path with a wide variety of spiritualities available to all.

Both age and the label of universality are thought to validate New Age practices. However, according to Hanegraaff:

> the historical roots of the New Age movement actually have a more recent origin....the New Age movement can be regarded as a contemporary manifestation and transformation of Western esoteric currents and traditions which originated in the early Renaissance.[73]

So the earliest century to which New Age can be traced is the fifteenth when ideas which went counter to the dominant Western Christian tradition started to

[72] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 292.
[73] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 293.

be explored throughout Western Europe.[74] This may be the historical root, but nothing like the contemporary manifestation of New Age was possible until at least the nineteenth century. To be more specific,

> the 19th century produced radically innovative mixtures of traditional esoteric and modern rationalist and scientific ideas. The result was a *new* phenomenon, which is best referred to as "occultism". Occultism may therefore be defined as secularized esotericism. It is this 19th-century phenomenon, and not some supposed universal gnosis, which forms the historical foundation of New Age.[75]

The concepts of what we understand as New Age reach back to the Renaissance but the contemporary expression came about through cross disciplinary influence that was first possible in the nineteenth century. What started in the Renaissance were ideas, not necessarily practices; the bringing together of strands of religious and spiritual thought which to that point had not had the opportunity to meet. If writers think that by using New Age as a reference point that a long, universal spiritual tradition is being evoked, they are mistaken. This is an important point for those who research the history of religious thought, and another historical moment of specific interest and potential confusion is the 1960s.

As with so many 'countercultural' developments in the 1960s a "popular revolution of religious consciousness" also took place.[76] Where performance art had the earlier movements of futurism and dadaism, New Age had intellectual and artistic precedents representing a variety of practices stemming from the nineteenth century.[77] The academic and intellectual interest in the practices and ideas along with the specific "popular revolution" came together under the name

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[74] The Italian Renaissance started in the late thirteenth century and spread slowly to other European countries. Hanegraaff mentions it in relation to the changes that took place in the fifteenth century.

[75] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 294.

[76] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism Between Counterculture and New Complexity,' *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 1.1 (2001), 5-37 (p. 5).

[77] For more on the various influences which developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Hanegraaff, 'Beyond the Yates Paradigm.'

New Age in the 1960s.

Popularly held ideas that New Age is either a universal spiritual tradition with a long history, or a new countercultural manifestation of spiritual energy both have an element of truth to them, but they are also extremely flawed if presented without clarification and qualification. Whether Abramović is reacting specifically to either of these ideas when she refuses to be associated with the practices is not clear. Regardless of the reason, an academic comparison to New Age without qualification is not a rigorous application of the term. The use of New Age as a form of shorthand to bring to mind certain types of practices is equally uninformed.

One other idea worth mentioning in relation to New Age: there are inherent dualisms in the logic of the moment that position it squarely as a product of Western culture. Since the 1960s many concepts have come to be accepted as stereotypical of New Age. These include, a focus on 'healing,' 'holistic thinking' and 'alternative spirituality.' Such attributes are neither inherently positive nor negative in contemporary Western society; healing and holistic approaches are generally understood as beneficial. Yet, behind all practices there exist inherent logics. If New Age is synonymous with 'healing' and 'holistic thinking,' and if it is an alternative to mainstream Western approaches, than it is also inherently critical of Western approaches, in the assumption that it provides what is missing from Western practices.

While New Age thinking does not always articulate a position of cultural criticism, a position is nevertheless inherent:

> New Age thinking in general is characterized by a pervasive pattern of implicit or explicit culture criticism. Within a New Age context one may encounter a very wide variety of ideas and convictions, but underneath there is a general dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Western thought

such as one may encounter in contemporary culture.[78]

That New Age is critical of aspects in society is not a *problem*, but the way in which these criticism are manifested is important. When Abramović's work is called New Age the superficial comparison might be with a known stereotypical practice such as the use of crystals in her piece *Shoes For Departure*. According to the quotation, even this seemingly small aspect – the use of crystals – in New Age is part of the "pervasive pattern of...cultural criticism." And to a large degree this kind of cultural criticism finds expression in dualism: "New Agers usually ascribe dualist and reductionist tendencies in Western culture to the influence of a dogmatic, institutionalized Christianity on the one hand, and an overrationalist science on the other."[79] This dualism may focus on religion (omniscient God against humans), ecology (humans against nature), and health care (treating the body but not the spirit) among others.[80] In opposing traditional dualisms, new ones are created, i.e., institutionalized religion is wrong and, thus, New Age is right. This pattern is congruent with Plato's Theory of Forms and shows New Age to be rooted in Western patterns of thought.

In this respect Abramović's work does not bear out the comparison. She might well be critical of aspects of Western culture, but to take *Shoes For Departure* as an example, it is a stretch to say that by asking people to use shoes made of crystals as a starting point to meditation that she is criticizing all of Western culture for its ignorance of meditation practices. She refers to her work as enabling or facilitating, not as trying to 'fix.'[81] Abramović's specific rejection

[78] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 291.
[79] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 292.
[80] Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion', p. 291.
[81] Abramović has often spoken of the lack of time in society to reflect, to meditate, to let the soul experience things. One aspect of Western culture that she has attacked is the amount of fear in comparison with other cultures such as the Aborigines in Australia. Her response is to facilitate

of the term New Age in relation to her work signals, not that there is no comparison to be made, but that the work was not created with principals of New Age in mind.[82] The writers who use New Age to describe her work do not explain whether they are using the term in a popular sense or in relation to academic research on the topic.

Writing on New Age differs from that on shamanism as almost every aspect of New Age, including the term itself, is currently being debated by scholars within fields which examine religious and spiritual practices.[83] Whereas shamanism is an accepted term and concept which is relevant to many cultures around the globe, but is not up for debate and definition in the same way. What the two have in common in relation to performance writing is their use as shorthand to denote practices which are participatory, open, personal, linked to universal practices and simultaneously uniquely appropriate for contemporary society. Looking in depth at Abramović's work with these explanations in mind helps to situated how performance is being theorised in contemporary writing.

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experiences for those who cannot go and live with the Aborigines, but not to implicitly or explicitly claim that only by adopting such practices will Western society be viable.

[82] Abramović is aware of her own rhetoric: "But of course if you talk too much about this you become "spooky" or "new age." Spirituality in art is sometimes seen badly." Abramović in Delia Bajo, and Brainard Carey, 'Marina Abramovic in Conversation With Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey', *The Brooklyn Rail*, Winter (2003) <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2002/11/art/marina-abramovic> [accessed 15 April 2009].

[83] New Age is associated and confused with other practices: "If countercultural/religionist approaches were accepted in the academy at all (a development which took place in the United States, but has always remained alien to Western Europe[an] universities), they tended to understand "esotericism" as more or less synonymous with "spirituality", "the sacred", or even "religion" in general—thus blurring from the outset the specificity of Western esotericism as a *separate* domain consisting of a definite number of specific historical currents. On the other hand, to the extent that Western esotericism *was* presented as a separate field of study, academics were bound to suspect religionist agendas implying apologies for esotericism rather than an academic study of it; and as a result, they would tend to reject it. In many cases their suspicions were correct, but in other cases they were mistaken: to this day, scholars studying Western esotericism from an academic perspective may encounter opposition because they are incorrectly assumed to be apologists. Finally, even if this does not happen, the field still runs the risk of being perceived as some self-enclosed and out of the way pursuit with little or no relevance to problems of general importance to academics." Hanegraaff, 'Beyond the Yates Paradigm', p. 26. For a discussion of major trends in academic discourse on New Age see Liselotte Frisk, 'Is "New Age" a Construction? Searching a New Paradigm of Contemporary Religion,' <http://www.cesnur.org/2005/pa_frisk.htm> [accessed 29 March 2007].

Practices which can be called participatory, open, etc., are understood as positive and of interest to participants. Those who write about performance associate Abramović's pieces with these kinds of experiences and believe that others will understand these forms of shorthand. These are two examples of what happens when terms are latched onto for their utility with little regard for the larger implications. There are many other terms that are also problematic and some of these will become clearer in the final analysis of this section.

## MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: PROCESS AND ACTION

The case study on Abramović's work has three main parts. Firstly, background is provided through a factual description of each of three pieces: *Shoes for Departure*, *In Between*, and *The House With the Ocean View*. Following this, I present Abramović's comments on her own work. Her rhetoric is important to the final analysis because it provides context for my critique of other writers and their assumptions of her work. Finally, I analyse her work, with a focus on *The House With the Ocean View* as an example of contemporary performance art that shows its embeddedness in the Western and Christian logics of ritual structure and the rhetoric of spirituality.

### Descriptions

#### *Shoes for Departure*

*Shoes for Departure* (hereafter *Shoes*) is an installation piece consisting of a pair of non-traditional shoes made from hewn amethyst that are too heavy to ever be used for walking. Six pairs were created in 1991 and they have been displayed in galleries around the world. Abramović provides instruction for the participants

who use the shoes. These instructions are simple and specific (see Figure 2 instructions). The public are invited to use the shoes under these terms. Participants are encouraged to use the shoes for as little or as much time as they want (during the opening hours of the gallery). When an installation opens, Abramović is often present and uses the objects herself along with participants in the gallery. However, when she is not in the gallery the only reminder of her physical presence, is the fact that she created the objects. The documentation of this piece emphasises the creative process used to make the pieces. On a trip to Brazil in 1990-91 she visited the amethyst mines where, among other things, she spent time meditating.



Figure 2

**Shoes for Departure** (Amethyst, Artists Studio, Berlin,1991)

Instructions for the Public

Enter the shoes with bare feet
Eyes closed
Motionless
Depart

Time: Limitless[84]

Two images from those meditations appear in her books. One appears to be inside the mine while the other is outside; both images show her lying down or sitting in front of a huge wall of amethyst. A little camp bed isused in both pictures and her eyes are closed. In both pictures Abramović is dressed in the same drab green clothing, her hair is loose. The captions say that she meditated for an hour in one instance and a day in the other. She believes that natural elements have certain powers which can be felt by people who take the time to ‘listen.’ The shoes are

[84] ‘Shoes for Departure’ and ‘Inner Sky for Departure’, *Rest in Space*, (2003) <http://www.rest-in-space.net/basis/abramovic.html> [Accessed 9 April 2009].

her way of providing an opportunity for others to interact with the minerals.

The documentation of this piece is useful to situate how she works and to read what she has to say about her work. Crystals also feature in *The House With the Ocean View* so it is helpful to know how she conceives of their importance to her pieces. While Abramović does not dictate the kind of experience one must have when participating in her pieces, she does provide strict instructions as to the proper methods of engagement. The concept of using an object as a trigger for an experience can be extrapolated and applied to other objects, e.g. one could stand on or in some other object and still follow the instructions and attempt to have an experience. Ideally this is what Abramović says participants should eventually be able to do – experience transformation without the need of the artist or an object.

What caught my attention about this piece was its simplicity. Most of the other objects which Abramović started to create out of minerals after her time in China involve some other material such as wood or metal and the participant often just looks at the mineral, or e.g., sits in a chair in which a mineral 'pillow' is embedded.[85] *Shoes* is different in that the mineral is the object which has been shaped into an easily identifiable form and its use is takes an everyday object and turns it into something spiritual.

### *In Between*

As an example of an installation piece, *In Between* (1996) is neither strictly an object, nor strictly a performance. Placed in galleries this piece was mounted in a room that participants entered after signing a contract wherein they agreed to

[85] One other piece which appears in various guises involves mineral 'pillows' attached to the wall at various heights. These are usually grouped in threes and the instructions are to press the head, heart and sex into the pillows and wait for the energy exchange.

abide by Abramović's instructions. As they left, the participants also received a document, from Abramović, thanking them for their participation. With its reciprocal exchange of documents, Abramović facilitated an experience that was based on expectations; hers, that the participant would and could agree to the terms; and theirs, that the piece was worth the commitment of signing and abiding by a document. The piece has two parts, 1) an audio recording of Abramović reading out instructions, which the audience listened to through earphones while blindfolded, and 2) a video of Abramović and objects. The audience entered the space, sat down and donned the blindfolds and headphones. Instructions were listened to through the headphones and were to be followed precisely – see Appendix B. Towards the end of the instructions the audience were told to remove the blindfolds and look at the projection of the video on the screens. The video installation consisted of Abramović tracing lines on her hand and fingers and eyes with a needle.

In this piece the participants' performance is scripted by Abramović. She dictates what can be heard and what should be done (by following the instructions) before seeing the video. The text which is listened to through the headphones is a kind of meditation. Although different in style from *Shoes*, both pieces are about a meditative state. These examples of Abramović's work both offer an experience which is contingent on following instructions – a script. The script implies that there is a purpose to the objects/installation and an outcome for the participant.

Again with this piece it is possible to follow the instructions given to the original participants, but the experience would be fundamentally different without Abramović's voice giving the instructions, the video at which to look, nor a room

full of co-participants with whom to participate at the same time and share reactions at the end. What is different about this piece from other installations are the instructions. The style and structure of the text interests me because of the structural similarity to liturgical text. The progression through awareness in the body and the final instruction to 'Go' reminded me of Christian uses of the body in liturgy.[86] After reading the instructions for this piece the instructions for other pieces, such as *Shoes*, took on added significance.

***The House With the Ocean View***

*The House With the Ocean View* (hereafter *House*) was performed over twelve days at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City from 15-26 November, 2002. Abramović performed in the gallery space for the audience/participants during the days and slept there at night. The line between audience and participant is not obvious in this piece, for reasons which will become clear. *House* consisted of three suspended rooms, six feet deep, constructed in one section of the gallery. Each white box was hung next to but not touching the next other. Peggy Phelan describes the performance space:

> Abramović spent her time moving across three stages, each suspended about six feet from the floor, and buttressed with center ladders with butcher knives for rungs. The stage to the viewer's left had a toilet and shower, the center stage had a wooden table and chair with a large crystal embedded in its back, and the right stage had a wooden platform for a bed. Each day the artist wore a different color linen jacket and trousers.[87]
>
> In addition to the glass and water pitcher, there was also a metronome tapping out the passage of time, and sometimes pacing Abramović's breathing. In the back of the gallery, a telescope was set up, focussed to a

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[86] For a short article on Eastern Orthodox liturgical practices see Chryssavgis, John, 'The prayer of liturgy in the Orthodox Church,' in *Theology Today* (October, 2001), <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3664/is_200110/ai_n8961920> [accessed 30 March 2009].

[87] Peggy Phelan, 'Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows', *Theatre Journal*, 56 (2004), 569-577 (p. 574).

magnification that made it possible for the audience to discern each hair of her eyebrows.[88]

As with the chair, (Figure 3), the bed also had a crystal pillow embedded in it (Figure 5). Also, the white and blue clothes are shown in these images.



Figure 3

Throughout the performance Abramović maintained a strict regime, not eating or drinking anything besides water and not communicating (no reading, writing or speaking) except to hum and sing.[89] The stated aim of the installation was to engage participants in “an energy dialogue” — “This consisted primarily of an exchange of gaze between the artist and her spectators (usually one at a time). This exchange, in turn, was observed by the other viewers.”[90] Two other rooms were part of the event. One showed a video of Abramović and the ocean,[91] the other room was called the ‘dream room’ and participants could sign up for an hour slot to sleep/dream. Participants came into the space and could stay for as long as the gallery was open.

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[88] Phelan ‘On Seeing the Invisible: Marina  Abramović’s *The House With the Ocean View*’, in *The House With the Ocean View*, Marina Abramović (Milan: Charta, 2004), pp. 171-179 (p. 176).
[89] Phelan ‘On Seeing’, p. 176.
[90] Phelan, ‘Witnessing Shadows’, p. 574.
[91] “Stromboli, a single channel 30 minute video, is named for the island south [sic] of Sicily that is the only permanently active volcano in Europe and has experienced small eruptions approximately every 15 minutes for the last 2000 years. In the video the artist lies at the edge of the ocean, between land and sea, her head moving in response to the waves.” *The House With the Ocean View*, ‘Press Release’, Sean Kelly Gallery (2002) <http://www.skny.com/exhibitions/2002-11-15_marina-abramovi/pressrelease/> [accessed 9 April 2009] paragraph 5 of 6.

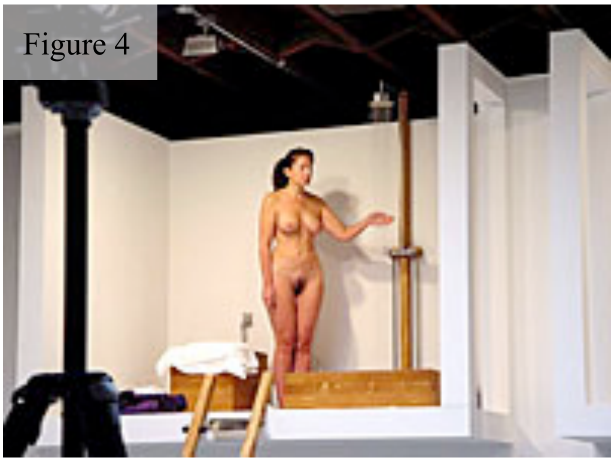


Figure 4

There was a line drawn across the main room dividing Abramović's space from the rest. People came and watched from any part of the room, either standing, sitting or lying on the floor. Abramović spent the time making eye contact with those who came as well as repeating actions such as singing, dressing, showering, drinking and peeing. She occasionally rearranged the furniture. Articles written about the event report that both Abramović and participants cried at certain points in the performance: "*As I looked, my eyes burned, laughed, cried. I became untied.*'[92] Crying is the only experience (besides looking) which both Abramović and the public shared in the space.

*House With the Ocean View* is the most written about and photographed of the three pieces. Besides being the subject of many articles, Abramović has published a book solely on the installation which includes a day by day breakdown of every moment as she remembers it or as it was documented.

The book recommends that the reader either read the documentation of one day of the performance each day for twelve days or that the book be read through in one

[92] Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 173. [Original emphasis.] Another response from Goldberg also mentions tears: "It stems from a personal challenge so unlikely, to make her world a stage, and is constructed with such restraint, the artist installed on a suspended platform only six feet deep on one wall of a gallery, that its success is almost uncanny, especially given the broad sweep of audience members who were moved, some to tears, to sit with Abramović for a large part of her twelve-day vigil." RoseLee Goldberg, 'The Theater of the Body', in *The House With the Ocean View,* by Marina Abramović (Milan: Charta, 2004), pp. 157-159 (p. 157).

sitting. The idea is that the reader will get a sense of the "full duration of the event."[93] The most recent of her large scale works, at that time, its physical size and duration were relevant to the study of ritual. Many longer articles about this piece included descriptions and personal anecdotes from the writers. All the written accounts seemed to be in agreement that this piece had been profoundly spiritual. I had already seen hints of liturgical rhythms in the other pieces, and *House* put them into practice.


Figure 5

Everything that Abramović claims about her work – that it is about the participant, that transformation is the goal and that the body is the focus – is evident in this piece. The piece has also been compared to a wide variety of religious and spiritual practices making it a good example with which to bring together the strands of this dissertation.

Together *Shoes for Departure*, *In Between* and *The House With the Ocean View* provide examples of how Abramović's performance art relies on ritual and incorporates structures reminiscent of Western liturgical action; *Shoes* uses an object in a liturgical manner; *In Between* uses text to focus awareness on the body

[93] Marina Abramović, *The House with the Ocean View* (Milan: Charta, 2004), p. 41.

in a directed group meditation; and *House* combines objects and text in performance with the aim of changing the awareness of the participants.

## Abramović in Her Own Words

> I want to do more long durational pieces because there is an amazing possibility for transformation and elevation of spirit. Not just for the performer but also for the audience.[94]

Now that all three pieces have been introduced and put in context, Abramović's own ideas are added to provide background to her processes. What she says and how she says it is important to understanding how her work has been interpreted and understood. I have avoided applying an analysis, but have clarified comments or elements of pieces. Abramović constantly uses the term transformation to explain why she performs, what she experiences and what she wants others to experience.[95] She wants to facilitate profound experiences that allow for something new to happen to the participant, which would not have happened without the experience. Abramović prizes transformation above all else in her performances; she wants to be transformed as much as she wants participants to be transformed.

## ***Shoes for Departure, In Between*** **and** ***The House With the Ocean View***

Abramović has explained her objects many times in her books and in interviews since she and Ulay first started to exhibit them in the 1980s. It was in the 1980s that she and Ulay spent a year living with the Aborigines in Australia; an

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[94] Abramović and Spector, p. 27.

[95] For a definition of transformation see Chapter 2. The term transformation is used widely in performance studies. In a recent book Erika Fischer-Lichte undertakes a close analysis of the term in relation to performance art practices. In particular she discusses the importance of the experience of the participants. They must have a performance experience and not just an interpretive one (pp. 17-18). Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. by Saskya Iris Jain (London: Routledge, 2008).

experience they credited with a shift in their focus: "After searching for physical limits, as in body art, we have arrived in a world that is completely unknown to us….we have changed from seeking for physical limits to seeking for spiritual limits."[96] One way of encouraging others to search for their own limits was through the use of objects and *Shoes For Departure* fits into the larger discussion of her 'transitory objects.'

> After walking the Chinese Wall I realized that for the first time I had been doing a performance where the audience was not physically present. In order to transmit this experience to them I built a series of transitory objects with the idea that the audience could actively take part. The basic structure was sitting, standing and lying.[97]

Abramović conceives of her objects as a way for others to enter into transformation. At first the person learns how to achieve transformation with the object, although ideally, as she explains here, the participant will learn to achieve the desired state without the object:

> As I was building the objects I paid a lot of attention to the materials I used. I limited myself to materials like copper, iron, wood, minerals, pig blood and human hair. I believe these materials contain certain energies. I do not consider these works as sculptures, but as transitory objects to trigger physical or mental experiences among the public through direct interaction. When the experience is achieved the object can be removed.[98]

The aim of the objects is to create participants out of the audience who have to use the object while seated, standing or lying down, depending on how the object is constructed. Abramović does not think of the experience facilitated by the objects as being less valuable than her experience. While it is not the same, she places these two kinds of experience next to each other and calls both performances.

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[96] Marina and Ulay quoted in *Art From Europe* (London, Tate Gallery Publications, 1987), p. 8.
[97] Marina Abramovic, *Marina Abramovic: Public Body*, *Installation and Objects, 1965-2001* (Milan: Charta, 2001), p.84.
[98] Abramović, *Public Body,* p. 84.

The materials are important and their textures and weights are used in the design and use of the objects, e.g. the shoes*,* although somewhat polished, are made entirely of rough hewn amethyst and are too heavy and large to actually be used for walking. The purpose behind the object dictates its size and composition. In this case because the shoes are not meant to be used for walking, they preclude walking:

> I have crystal shoes. I have instructions for the public to take off your shoes and, with naked feet, put on the two crystal shoes, close your eyes, don't move, and make your departure. I'm talking about a mental, not physical, departure. So the public can enter certain states of mind helped by the material itself. Material is very important for me....The materials already have a certain energy.[99]

As the person recognizes how to achieve a 'state of mind' and makes the connection to the personal work required to get to the state, the object as means-to-an-end is made obsolete. Abramović calls attention to the material of the shoes, to the physicality and materiality of the experience, and the everyday object of a shoe is made strange, or special, because it cannot be used as a shoe:

> Of all my objects, the ones that have had the best reception are the *Shoes for Departure*, 1991. They're impossible shoes, because they weigh 65 kilos (143 lbs.) and nobody can move them, but nevertheless they're described as being "for departure."[100]

By making it impossible for the participant to connect the object with normal use it is the performative experience takes precedence; the process behind transformation becomes visible, the moment of experience is set apart.

This manner of interacting with the audience seems quite different from

[99] Abramović in Janet A. Kaplan, 'Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramovic', *Art Journal*, Summer (1999), 6-21 (p. 9).
[100] Marina Abramović and Germano Celant, 'Towards a Pure Energy', *Public Body: Installations and Objects, 1965-2001* (Milan: Charta, 2001), pp. 9-29 (p. 21).

performances which place Abramović's action as the focus of an event.

Abramović often mentions the problem of audience passivity:

> Many people think that with my work on *Transitory Objects* I abandoned performance. For me the *Transitory Objects* are a further journey into performance, only that here the objects are made for the audience, and for me they become a work of art when they are used by someone.

Abramović is clear that the use of objects is an important part of her work and her focus on the entire person in performance. In *House* she used some of the original *Transitory Objects*, i.e. the chair and bed with mineral pillows, thus incorporating her live performance with her desire for audience participation. While performance is still her main form of engagement with an audience she is critical of the traditional relationship this creates:

> In traditional performance the role of the spectator is always that of passive observers, but my desire is that everyone should have their own experience. I think that individual physical experience is extremely important, since it is the only way of changing our awareness of things. No one has ever been transformed by watching a performance, or by reading a good book, but a real experience can change awareness.[101]

The goal of her performance, according to her, whether with or without objects is transformation, an experience, a shift in awareness. All of these terms can point to the spiritual, but are not precise enough. Abramović does not claim a spiritual heritage or connection, yet her choice of words is very close to those used by religious and spiritual practices and her own research is inspired by religious people.[102] Learning how to pray, meditate and participate in religious and

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[101] Denegri, p. 19.

[102] Talking about a different piece of work from 1998, Abramović describes her fascination with prayer. "In the other part of the installation…I shot repetitive moments in prayer ceremonies. I show a sixty-year-old Tibetan woman who prayed by prostrating herself, repeating this moment over and over through the day. This is ten or fifteen hours of work. If you asked anybody even in the best physical condition to do such a thing, it would be impossible. But if you cross a threshold into a certain state of mind, you can push your body over this limit. My whole research in this piece is to find the limit. How can a Western body have this experience, and how can an Eastern body push much farther into an area unknown for us? I am interested in this because for me

spiritual rituals also often involves the use of objects to facilitate early experiences. In many traditions the longer a person practices the less they rely on specific objects or places to engage in spiritual behaviours.[103] Abramović uses her work to achieve transformation and encourages others to find their own points of transformation.

It was through experimentation with various art forms that she started to focus on the body as her medium. She realised after her first performances in Yugoslavia that to work with painting or sculpture would not result in the kinds of intense reactions she desired. Performing in front of people gave her an experience, but those present were still mostly left to watch. The objects are meant to bridge this divide and they operate firstly as aids to transformation and later are meant to be triggers for the individual to go through their own process and experience of transformation.

> I was performing and I was giving them the energy. Now there is a trigger….But that is not enough. What it must be is a synergy between the object and yourself. You think it is in the object, but at some point you realize, after you go away, that it is in you. So it is you and not the object, that's why I call them transitory objects.[104]

Abramović places responsibility on the participant as she wants the individual to be in control of their own transformation, but she is simultaneously very specific about how to appropriately use the objects:

> [T]he instructions are fundamental because the object mustn't be used in any other way. I want the objects to have functions connected with our own basic body positions, which may have to do with sitting, or lying down or standing, having your eyes closed or open, not eating or not

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performance is a means of research to find mental and physical answers." Marina Abramović in Kaplan, p. 8.

[103] As an example, Christians learn various forms of prayer, such as individual prayer at home and corporate prayer in churches, but all of these lead to the individual being able to pray in any space, place or circumstance as needed throughout life.

[104] Marina Abramović in *19 Projects: Artists-in-Residence at the MIT List Visual Arts Center*, (Cambridge MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1996), p. 65.

> moving. They are almost requests for a commitment; a wrong use would make them meaningless.[105]

Commitment to the promise of the experience is something that Abramović reiterates; she commits and expects the same from those around her.

Abramović identifies two parts to the performance with the objects: firstly where she first came in contact with the elements – she performed at the Great Wall and in mines in Brazil where she developed ideas for these performances; and secondly the creation in her studio and the demonstrations in galleries where they were installed. She asserts that a performance can impact those who use the objects created through performance processes if they commit to the experiences triggered by these objects. In *House* a new performance brought together the objects, a durational piece, and aspects of the walk in China as Abramović wore her walking boots from the trip and used the crystals which she became aware of during the *Great Wall Walk.* Over time she layers aspects of different pieces, bringing together the parts that are of most importance to her.

Abramović talks of the promise of her performance in terms of being open, if the participant can find a way to be open, an experience will likely take place. Ideally the object acts as a tool for the participant and over time conditioning happens such that it becomes 'easy' to reach the promise of transformation:

> So it is a way to come to another state of mind. All our work is about transforming a state of mind. It is not important what you are doing, what is important is the state of mind from which you do what you are doing. My own work is always based on this idea — how to condition the audience, the participants and myself to get into the right state of mind. Then everything else is just the means you are using whether it is performance, video or Polaroids, they are, in a sense, interchangeable. It's

[105] Abramović and Celant, p. 10.

> the state that's important.[106]

Although Abramović cannot control the state of mind of her participants she stresses the importance of a good state of mind to allow for transformation. In order to facilitate this Abramović demands much of her own state in performance – she says that she tries to maintain a state which will show others what is possible.

The transitory object is a means to an end, a state of mind, and yet it is not the end product which is of most interest, but the process that leads to the transformative state; "You need discipline and then something else can happen."[107] For her the state enables further experiences which are useful in the everyday:

> I go through this transformation *in the work*; work transforms me, and then I use this experience in 'real life'. Normally it is the other way round: you do something, you get experience in life and then you use it for your performance. My work is basically a learning process.[108]

While there are many possible types of 'transformations' in the field of performance Abromović consistently invokes the spiritual in both her own solo work and in the pieces developed for participants. The nature of her search for the spiritual is not related to a religion and not even necessarily based in traditional methods of seeking the spiritual.

> The whole idea is that in the coming century it will not be enough for only the artist to be transformed. My idea of the future is finally art without objects. You must remove the objects because they are only temporary. There must be a communication of energy on a higher level, a direct transmission between the artist and the public.[109]

Exactly what this spirituality is, is not defined by Abramović as she does not subscribe to one type of practice. In fact her own practice is constantly shifting

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[106] Abramović in *19 Projects*, p. 63.
[107] Heathfield, p. 147.
[108] Heathfield, p. 148. [Original emphasis.]
[109] Abramović in *19 Projects*, p. 65.

based on the piece she is developing or has just performed. Throughout the last forty years of performing Abramović has repeatedly disciplined her body and yet, she does not think that she is capable of using this discipline in everyday life. As previously mentioned, she only maintains the discipline needed for a performance project for the length of the project itself. Her repeated search is interesting given that she also tries to impart discipline to others so that they can benefit from what the performances bring to their own lives: "for me performance is a means of research to find mental and physical answers."[110]

Living in the Sean Kelly Gallery for twelve days was a perfect example of the kind of work that forces Abramović into a pattern. In a minimalist space the body was the primary focus of all those who entered the gallery; the body has been Abramović's focus throughout her career: "the whole idea [is] of the body as a material, the body as a material through which you transmit something."[111] Having refrained from talking during the performance, at the end Abramović "came down from the stage and told the gathered crowd that she wanted to come to New York to give the busy island time. Time to heal, time to think, time to love, and time to live, despite death, with death."[112] She also told the assembled crowd: "This work is as much you as it is me."[113] She told them they had been 'working' alongside her through the twelve days. The repeated search for something spiritual, in this case amid the continuing social and cultural disruption from the events of September 11, 2001, is what Abramović returns to in each of her pieces:

> "With most fasting, you're not eating because you're protesting something. But in my case, I wanted to draw on fasting in the ancient

[110] Marina Abramović in Kaplan, p. 8.
[111] Abramović, *Cleaning House* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), p. 83.
[112] Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 25.
[113] Goldberg, 'The Theater of the Body', p. 158.

> times -- Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, you name it -- any culture has fasting as a ritual of purification of the body and the mind. I wanted people to stop and live in the here-and-now and reflect. And it was important that I was there, all the time, in the present."[114]

**Analysing Abramović's Performances of Belief**

To this point Abramović's work has been presented in her words, or the words of those who have been present at her performances, and who have interacted with her objects. There are still important questions to be asked of what the work does, how it does it, and what that performative action can mean. This is the last piece of the dissertation and it is an extended analysis of not only Abramović's work but of the analyses done by other writers. Woven together here are the discussions on: liturgical art from the 1600s, metaphysical structures, the impact of belief systems on language, and the repercussions of anthropological tendencies to 'other' practices that are not Western. The performance of belief as it is found in liturgy and performance art will be shown to be physical, material, and necessarily embodied.

***Shoes for Departure***

In *Shoes*, Abramović provides an object with a descriptive title and specific, if short, instructions. Firstly, I want to look at the objects. The shoes are easily identified as shoes by the shape and size. The title and instructions repeat the word departure and shoes are normally used for travelling by foot, departing from one place to arrive at another. Yet the way in which the shoes are used is tangential to the normal use, i.e. people stand in the shoes, but cannot walk in them. In the liturgy many objects are used in this fashion. Bread is still bread but

[114] Saint Louis, 'What Were They Thinking'.

not for a meal. Wine is drunk, but not for flavour, for socialising, or to quench thirst. The bread and wine are cast as being part of the Eucharistic meal, but the meal does not provide enough nourishment to make a difference. The objects are important in relation to their physical and material presence.

The material of the shoes prohibits movement and forces the wearer to engage with the performative nature of the encounter. If anything is going to 'happen' the participant has to perform according to Abramović's instructions. The 'departure' of the title, and in the instructions, is the main action that is required. It is not meant to confuse the participant, but to clarify the action as that of meditation. And at the end of the encounter the user will depart from the gallery or museum.

The shoes are also similar to the use of the ciborium in the liturgy. Both objects can only be used by a person according to the instructions provided, however, the spiritual interaction is completely open in both cases; something will happen, but whether it will be transformative, or spiritual is unknown. The many potential representative meanings that a person will associate with the objects, e.g. the ciborium could be thought of as a bowl, gold, a sarcophagus, an artefact, etc., are all dependent on previous participation in performances of the liturgy. In the case of the shoes, most people will only ever see an exhibit once and will most likely not meet Abramović. In *Shoes* the object is the focus of any encounter as it is present and it is through the use of the object that the performance happens. The ciborium is similar in that it is not the designer of the object, nor the baker of the bread which is then put in the ciborium who is the focus for the participant. The object facilitates the performative encounter which is only possible through the actions of the participant.

The shoes are available to be used, for people to stand in, but they do not define the parameters of the entire experience. Much as the ending of Maundy Thursday puts in motion three days of liturgical performance, stepping out of the shoes does not end the effects of the experience. 'Depart' is also similar to the end of the liturgy – 'Go in peace.' In both cases the participant takes that which they have experienced with them and into the rest of their day, week, month, etc. The person who entered the gallery is different to the person who leaves the gallery; by virtue of having participated a transformation has occurred.

***In Between***

*In Between* also uses a text to define the parameters under which the performance and participation can happen. The participant is given a contract, a blindfold, and headphones and told to follow instructions. The physical state of the participant is more defined than in *Shoes* because of these objects and what they demand of the body, and because signing the contract is the only way to enter the installation. Once in the installation the body of the participant is then subject to outside forces which restrict the senses (blindfold and headphones). These restrictions are understood by the participant as necessary because of the contract.[115] At the beginning the instructions are prescriptive and based on bodily responses – relax, breath. Just before telling the participant to remove the blindfold the kind of instruction changes from demanding (e.g. breath), to asking the hearer to engage the sense of smell, to feel with awareness what is happening mentally and physically. When the blindfold has been removed the language acknowledges its own limitations to command a response. Where before the instructions were

[115] The placing of the work in a gallery also accords the gallery a certain degree of trust from the participants who may base their participation on the reputation of the gallery to choose relevant and interesting artists. Also, some participants may want to participate in an Abramović piece.

specific – ‘take off your shoes, loosen your belt’ – now they require the participants to interpret and take control of the situation. The participants have agency in this moment, but there is no guarantee that they will do anything. Thus, ‘Observe’ is less of a command and more of a request as the participant has to choose what to observe and how. This instruction is the vaguest of the entire sequence and relies on the hearer to understand what kind of observation is meant. From this point the rest of the instructions assume the participant has chosen to act on the agency available and that this has changed the experience. Some might call this a ‘transformation,’ i.e. it could be assumed that the participation of the participant has altered their state and that they are now different from when they first entered the space.[116]

It is the last request that indicates the expectation that the participants will engage with the agency available and be open to transformation. ‘Go’ is reminiscent of ‘Depart’ from *Shoes* but carries with it an immediacy which presupposes that the participant will take everything that has happened and that has changed them out into the world as they leave, if only for a little while. Abramović negates any interaction but a ‘correct’ interaction, and the resulting actions are performative in their self-referentiality and repetition.

### *The House With the Ocean View*

In *The House With the Ocean View* Abramović offered a situation wherein the participants were taken out of the normal activities and offered the chance to experience their own transformation through engaging with her experience and everyday actions. It was crucial to this performance that she lived in the gallery

[116] As with the shoes, the participant can follow along actively or listen passively without breathing in time or trying to understand the instructions.

twenty-four hours a day, because in contrast to the liturgical context, where the majority of participants know what is required of them, visitors needed guidance to become participants. The gallery changed what were everyday actions (sleeping, drinking, dressing, sitting, etc.) by setting them apart. Through Abramović's decision to abstain from all but the most basic activities these actions were both completely recognizable, and made special, perhaps even sacred by elevating them. In the liturgy a group comes together to create and perform the liturgical action, and Abramović too was looking for this level of participation. However, as she was starting a new ritual, to succeed she needed participants and therefore had to establish a performance space that would allow anyone to engage. In this case there was no training or familiarity possible, but neither was there language and thus any barrier to participation through language was removed. This left the actions as the way for the participants to engage with the performance, or not.

The actions she chose to include highlighted the demands on the entire person, herself as well as all those who visited. As with the liturgy, participation had to be learned but this learning was refined to one main action; that of engaging with Abramović through looking into her eyes. Again, the main form of participation centred around performative action. To engage with Abramović by looking into her eyes was to enter into a simple yet unpredictable performative action which could only be accomplished in the moment by those present. Maintaining eye contact was not a reference to any other behaviour that had happened previous to this installation. To sit or stand in the space with her was to perform the self simultaneously with her performance of self. Abramović did not offer a performance to be copied, but facilitated a performance that would allow

others to have their own performative experiences. Each person in the room had to relate the use of Abramović's body to their use of their own body. In relating the performance context thus, I have identified aspects of Abramović's work that can be directly compared with liturgical rhythms and actions.

Of the three pieces it is *The House With the Ocean View* which approached the audience participation most holistically. The title is the most evocative; 'house' and 'ocean' mean different things to different people. Thus each person entering the space brings their personal 'houses' and 'views' to the space. In some ways *House* is more directed to the audience/participant than the other two pieces simply because Abramović performs continuously as a way to enable others to engage with the performance as a means to transformation. Abramović provided access to herself twelve days in a row in a gallery space in New York. Three distinct spaces were provided so that the participant could watch Abramović perform, watch a video or sign up to use the sleep/dream space. Each room had a visual element and two rooms enabled active physical participation. In the main space people could choose where to sit, where to stand, to use the binoculars and whether or not to make eye contact with Abramović. As Gay McAuley asserts, "[t]he experience of the individual spectator, while always personal, is also occurring at group and collective levels."[117] The social experience is foregrounded in Abramović's piece where groups interact in the multiple areas of the gallery spaces. In *House*, the participants and facilitators can see each other, as well being able to observe other people in the room. Each person decided what type and level of participation to undertake. The continuum from audience to participant was open to all who entered the space.

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[117] McAuley, p. 251.

The most detailed space was where Abramović performed, and here there were many objects and images for the participant to examine. The rooms were white with wooden furniture, pieces of minerals, a metronome, a jug and a glass. Some participants may have come across the furniture in the space in a previous installation. In *Shoes* the types of associations that could be made with the actual objects were limited by the object itself, i.e. only associations with shoes or amethyst or heaviness, or with a word in the instructions were immediately obvious. Whereas in *House* there were many more objects, textures and colours (especially because Abramović wore a different colour of clothes each day) allowing for an infinite number of personal associations. Where *Shoes* and *In Between* were somewhat restrictive, this piece was more open to both representative meaning and performative responses.

The instructions for *House* were more restrictive for Abramović than for the participants. The restrictions she imposed on herself also impacted those who joined her in the space as they could not speak to her, touch her or be in the rooms elevated off the floor. She provided the possibility of participant experience concurrent with her own experience of performing and because of the restrictions the most available action to both performer and participant was to have an exchange through eye contact.

The agency in this performative ritual action, to return to Mahmood, is found in "the relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices that constitute a particular discursive tradition." The discursive tradition of performance art is not what Mahmood meant as she was discussing piety. However, piety is about practices that are directly related to religion, veneration, faith, spirituality, duty, fervour and zeal. Abramović's piece is not part of a

religion, but her actions in the piece are very similar to those undertaken in religious ritual. Living in a gallery and maintaining an ascetic practice is a performance of piety. In *House* Abramović drew on the same embodied modes used in the liturgy. She did this through disciplined actions, her use of objects, the performance and repetition of actions, and the incorporation of other people in what became a corporate performance. The audience had to learn the ritual in order to participate.

For the participants who came to the gallery, what the ritual lacked in history was slightly made up for in duration and consistency over the course of the twelve days. Those who visited more than once were able to count on Abramović repeating what was already familiar which created a recognizable discourse. In this case participants knew that Abramović had committed to twelve days in the space. People responded to this by coming in every day before work or during lunch or on their way home. Some came in for fifteen minutes and ended up staying for hours. Some actively used their agency through the production of images shown to Abramović or by returning her gaze. Many participants chose to conform their use of time to that of Abramović's. People contemplated the everyday actions repeated before them in the gallery, or their own lives, or nothing at all.

Living in the gallery twenty four hours a day set Abramović apart from things such as telephone calls and cooking meals, while not removing her from sleeping, drinking, dressing, showering and going to the toilet. The role of the body as it is used over time and to accomplish actions, as well as the needs of the body were thus revealed through the presence of all the bodies in the space. Abramović alone in the space for twelve days would not have had the same

effect. This piece suggested that among the needs of the body is the need for interaction on a level that speech alone cannot attain.

The same elements that are in *Shoes* and *In Between* are also in *House*. The meditation asked for in *Shoes* is present here as well, but amplified by the concepts of personal discipline over time and not just for a few moments while standing in shoes. *House* implies that the state (mental or spiritual) which participants achieve while in the gallery can be replicated in daily life despite *and* due to the structure of actions undertaken every day. The necessity of daily activities and the transforming of these in community highlights the potential of any person to use the structure of life to change their reality. Making participants aware of their own rhythms was part of a text heard through headphones in *In Between* while in *House* it was shown directly through Abramović's repetitions. These repetitions, which had the potential to acquire and layer meanings with each successive action, recall repetitive corporate liturgical actions. Abramović's commitment to repeat actions with full intent and focus despite desires to eat or talk or read, recalls the commitment of congregations to perform together the liturgy in an embodied fashion despite any personal physical or material needs that may arise during a given Mass or in everyday life. There is, of course, no guarantee that participants will understand what is required of them in order to have an experience in either the Mass or in one of Abramović's pieces. Sufficient instructions are given to any willing participant in either circumstance so that participation is possible. Ultimately it is the participant who is responsible: facilitator and participant, are both invested in a successful performance process.

## WESTERN LITURGICAL REREADING OF PERFORMANCE: *The House With the Ocean View*

The development of this chapter has built on the previous three to construct a platform from which to discuss the relevance of considering Christian practices in relation to contemporary performance art. The main elements discussed throughout the dissertation from the fields of art, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology and performance studies come together in these final pages. To begin my reading of Abramovic's work as necessarily Western, I return to Hans Belting's account of liturgical art and engage for a moment in a semiotic reading of *House*. This serves to show that there are aesthetic similarities between the performance and the liturgical tradition.

Performance art clearly differs from the liturgical art of the 1600s described in the opening of this chapter, in size, location and the scale of public involvement. Belting discusses the larger implications of shifts in liturgical art, but he confines his analysis of the paintings to a semiotic reading. He names the elements that represent religious or mythological ideas and explains how these would have been understood in various decades. While not meant to be used in a Christian liturgy, a piece of performance art such as Abramović's *House* contains many semiotic points of comparison with the religious images of the past, and specifically with the liturgical uses of images. The piece encourages an embodied response from participants and suggests that people should engage in their own ritual acts. Abramović's role is both as the subject and the facilitator of the art.

Abramović's *House* aligns well with many aspects of the 'Holy Image' that Belting describes, e.g. the structure of the piece, which is a triptych with three inter-related panels. Triptychs were used in churches, often behind the altar where the Eucharist was celebrated. The three panels usually depict different

people or scenes. In each case the person in the painting stares out at the viewer making eye contact, which is part of what facilitates the interaction with the divine presence. *House* differs in that only a person animates only one panel at a time. As with liturgical paintings where the faces look outward, Abramović too stared at those assembled in the room making eye contact.[118]

Liturgical icons were believed to be themselves in the sense that an icon of a saint did not represent the saint, but actually contained the presence of the saint.[119] In this aspect, Abramović's presence is similar. She is present in the panels as herself; she is not a representation of anyone. Where the images were designed to show a spiritual reality and contain a presence, Abramović's *House* has a real presence and 'shows' a spiritual possibility. Many people who attended the piece have attested to having experienced something spiritual, but this is not a claim that can be made for all those who participated. The possibility of interaction in *House* returns us to the problem mentioned earlier by Belting about the crisis of the image. It is difficult for a Western audience to 'read' images as spiritual in any agreed upon manner. There is no longer an agreement as to what is spiritual and what is not, and how or even if it is acceptable to interact with such art. As we will see in the articles written about *House*, the topic of a religious experience was important to many who participated in the performance. However, because the writers seem at a loss to confidently associate the work with a religious tradition there is no clarity to be gleaned from reading these articles. Written reactions to the work identify that something was or could be

[118] She did not maintain eye contact at all times as she also moved around the space, took showers, dressed and drank water.
[119] Even as they are simultaneously showing something that cannot be tangibly present (Christ has been resurrected and thus his body cannot be on earth), it is believed that Christ can be present in the image. These icons are not representations of something that is not present, but presentations of presence.

experienced by interacting with the performance but are unable to agree on what this might be.

The artists and academics who write about Abramović's performances adopt her language and rhetoric; what is important to Abramović becomes important to them. Of course, Abramović has provided access to her opinion through her own publications which always include interviews as well as academic articles or reflections on the pieces. She controls much of the documentation of her pieces and it is clear that she is concerned with what and how information is communicated about the pieces she performs and facilitates. Those who write about her work are mainly drawn from a relatively contained group; artists, critics, academics. There are always new audience members but people in this group tend to come upon her work because of the location, e.g. the recent performance of *7 Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim in 2005 made her performance accessible to anyone who entered the museum in the evenings. The product of this educated group of audience members is written pieces that usually endorse Abramović's perspective.

The following is an example of a response to some of the early transitory objects that was included in the exhibit brochure for *Objects Performance Video Sound*:

> Abramović's latest work is evidence that, twenty years on, she is as obsessed with the present as she ever was. The current work contains the richness of a consistent but complicated history, with its own detailed iconography and autobiographical detours…. the new objects she has made embrace the viewer, supporting him or her at the base of the neck or along the length of the back: this is a quality that was not there before….Abramović says….“it is also about the question of how to come to a peaceful state of mind.”[120]

[120] Chrissie Iles, ed., *Marina Abramović: Objects Performance Video Sound* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 1995), p. 18.

Chrissie Iles endorses Abramović's seeming departure from earlier kinds of work, unquestioningly accepting the new 'gentler' version of interacting with the public. Abramović says the work is about coming "to a peaceful state of mind" and Iles analysis supports without a challenge. This short excerpt focuses on how the work is located in the present and is concerned not with representing the past or predicting the future, but with performing the present. It also emphasises that the work is about the state of mind, or spiritual state of the artist and the participant. This is a pattern that is repeated by almost all those who discuss Abramović's work.

Another person who has written extensively on Abramović's work is Germano Celant. In *Public Body: Installations and Objects, 1965-2001* he goes beyond describing the potential of the transitory objects as 'transformation' using the word 'transcend' instead: "Rather than implements, they're metaphors of potential energy, which a person can develop. They're an invitation to transcend the limits of one's own sensory and spiritual capability."[121] Celant makes the spiritual claim for the work and attests to the relevance and usefulness of engaging with Abramović's pieces.

Artists and academics have said that Abramović can transform situations with her presence.[122] Fellow artist Laurie Anderson commented on the power inherent in *House*:

> The *House with the Ocean View* reminded me that Marina can actually transform and direct thoughts. She understands and uses the ecstatic. And she creates transformation out of the simplest materials, featuring her own body. An intensely physical person, she combines it with the spiritual in a completely unique way.[123]

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[121] Abramović and Celant, pp. 21-22.
[122] Parts of this section have appeared in Megan Macdonald, 'The Liturgical Lens: Performance Art and Christianity', *Performance Research: On Congregation*, 13 (2008), 146-153.
[123] Anderson, 'Marina Abramović.'

The first aspect mentioned here is the transformation and direction of thought. This implicitly places mental/spiritual changes over physical ones. The soul is primary and the body secondary, echoing the antagonism highlighted by Murphy (in Chapter 1) and Cannell (in Chapter 2). There is no definition of what constitutes something spiritual or even a general idea of what is meant by that term. The binary structure of metaphysics asserts itself and is taken for granted.

Anderson's appraisal of the piece is entirely positive; she endorses the process, content and effects of Abramović's work:

> Recently I saw the truly transformative *House with the Ocean View* at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. The spirituality that has driven much of Marina's work was now central. Confrontation with the audience no longer had any props. For 12 days she lived in full view on a shelf in the gallery. She showered, drank water, sat on a toilet, brushed her hair, but mostly sat and looked at the people who came to see the show. It was about as direct as it gets. She was fasting for the duration and said later that this increased her sensitivity and connection to the audience. When I went to see her there I had a very powerful wordless encounter. I also was able to experience the passage of time in a unique way—at a tempo somewhere between music and meditation.[124]

Crediting her with not just a strong performance presence, but the ability to direct people's thoughts Anderson adds spiritually inflected language such as 'ecstatic' and 'unique' to her description thereby elevating the piece. Any commonalities with known religious practices are swept away with the claim that her physicality combined with 'the spiritual' is a new manifestation of possible spiritual experiences.

Peggy Phelan explains her personal understanding of the work and how performance art functions in spiritually relevant terms while crediting the audience with much of the resulting meaning in the performance. Yet while this could lead to a comparison with the liturgy, and the role of the congregation to

[124] Anderson, 'Marina Abromovic.'

act alongside the facilitator (Priest), the transformative aspect of Abramović's performance is not compared to a known spiritual experience:

> What distinguishes performance art from other arts, both mediated and live, is precisely the promise of this possibility of mutual transformation during the enactment of the event. By accepting both her audience's care for her safety and her audience desire to hurt her, Abramović transformed her relationship to the event. She was as moved by the performance as were any of her audience. Or, to put it differently, Abramović had the capacity to allow her spectators to transform her intended performance to such a degree that they became co-creators of the event itself.[125]

These analyses accept and promote how Abramović wants to be seen. She says that she does not want to be tied to any one spiritual practice to explain her work, so a plethora are mentioned – the work can thus remain spiritual but escapes specific categorisation. When the words that Abramović uses, such as transformation, are repeated by those who write about her work her vision of the work is recognized and validated.

Phelan's analysis also points to the kind of facilitator/participant relationship that we looked at in the last chapter in relation to Rancière's theories, i.e. "the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body."[126] As we have already seen in the liturgy, and as is described here, both facilitators and participants look and act, and all are simultaneously individuals and members of a collective body who are present at a performance event. The third thing that Rancière stipulated as necessary was something that belongs to no one, but can be referenced. As with the liturgy, in this case unique shared aspect is also the performance event. Abramović's experience of the event is radically different from that of the participants, and the two viewpoints can come together if and when the

[125] Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 173.
[126] Rancière, p. 19.

opportunity arises to discuss the experience. Similarly to the liturgy, this performance provides the opportunity to blur boundaries which are ultimately reaffirmed by the irreducible distances between each individual, but without which there would be no opportunity for interactions. The specific experience is only available to the individual, but the performance event is only possible through group participation.

Phelan wrote extensively about her own experience of *House* and attributes the spiritual aspects of the piece to a search for deeper, more universal themes:

> Abramović, who has been deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and shamanic wisdom from disparate traditions, learned during the early '70s that the border crossing traversed within performances that work on the art/life divide might be seen as a kind of rehearsal for that other crossing, the one between life and death.[127]

Specific mention of spiritual practices is a way to link the work with Buddhism and casts Abramović as a shaman able to deftly navigate the borders of both art/life and life/death. This quotation is an example of an unqualified use of shamanism lending to *House* a sense of the eternal with its supposed art/life/death resonances. The reference to Tibetan Buddhism is accurate, insofar as Abramović acknowledges her own relationship to Buddhism, but again it is not explained in relation to the work in question.

Anderson and Phelan both mention the unique and personal nature of the work, while others have claimed that Abramović has taken art to a new place on the continuum of performance practice, especially with relation to audience interaction:

> As Thomas McEvilley notes, Abramović's decision to live in the gallery repeats and extends similar decisions made by performance artists in the

[127] Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 173.

> seventies, including Chris Burden, Linda Montano, Gerard Richter, Gilbert and George, and others. But in these works, the artists performed "for" the audience, rather than "with" the audience.[128]

McEvilly claims the performance acts as a challenge to the normal functioning of art in the manner in which it engages the audience. In this reading Abramović does not use others' ideas in different ways, she 'extends' the understanding of what contemporary performance can achieve. In these estimations Abramović's approach is both part of the topics being debated in contemporary artistic practice and somehow simultaneously reaching towards a new form of intentional participation. She is part of and pushing the boundaries of what participation means and can mean.

Again and again comments place her work in relation to art practices, spiritual practices, performance practices, literature and the theatre. In one paragraph Johannes Birringer highlights almost all of the problems I have identified as he compares her work with all of the above:

> Abramović has performed alone, shifting her attention ever more relentlessly to the exploration of states of presence and consciousness, while also pursuing more explicitly her fascination with shamanic energies and spiritual practices, perhaps influenced by her visits to Tibet and Brazil and her research into minerals. [Her work] has shifted from the symbolic to a highly reduced, minimalist existentialism which, to some, may be infuriatingly close to an uncritical and unreflected new age spiritism. The asceticism of fasting and silence now belong to her strategies of creating works which ritualize very basic actions of everyday life like lying, sitting, standing, dreaming, and thinking. The asceticism, as a ritualized practice of being hyper-present, separates her work from merely task oriented actions, in the tradition of the Judson Church performers, the phenomenological interests of anthropological art, or the neo-concretist focus, in Lygia Clark's actions, on the manipulation of objects (through the body). This Zen-influenced practice also stands at the opposite end of the highly theatricalized actionism of the Viennese Orgien-Mysterien-Theater.[129]

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[128] Phelan, 'Witnessing Shadows', pp. 573-4.
[129] Johannes Birringer, 'Marina Abramović on the Ledge', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 74.25 (2003), 66-70 (pp. 66-7).

This response to *House* has potential as there are interesting points which could be expanded to provide a useful examination of what spirituality means in contemporary performance work. However, Birringer does not go any further than to list. The list shows just how prevalent the tendency to 'other,' adapted to some extent from anthropology, has become in relation to performance work. He is not alone in this style of writing. Peggy Phelan also provides a paragraph which tries to fit in a large number of possible inspirations for *House*:

> Whether one calls it environmental theatre or social sculpture, *House* extends something of the repetition and serialization at work in Warhol's Shadows into the realm of live art. While Warhol was operating within the economy of the object and setting up repeating copies of the same image, Abramović was theatricalizing the repetitive everyday acts of sleeping, showering, eliminating waste, and sitting at a table. But these acts, each perhaps an homage to the quotidian, did not render the performance a literal treatment of these common acts. On the contrary, the symbolic and metaphorical associations were dense, ranging from Kafka's Hunger Artist to the prayerful acts of a Sufi mystic. The accumulation of associations and meanings people brought to bear on the art quite literally added to its energetic force.[130]

While simultaneously showing how open the work is to individual identification, these comments also continue the othering I have discussed in relation to anthropological studies. The work may well bring to mind shamanism, or Sufism, but what will such a comparison mean to those who read the article in the West? Lack of knowledge about what a Sufi is and how and why that is mystic serve to make Abramović's work mysterious. This comparison complicates more than it clarifies. However, what could be put in its place? If Phelan had said 'Christian mystic' it would not necessarily have been crystal clear for an average reader, because any mystic practice is hidden, unknown, and secret. However, the descriptive term 'prayerful acts' together with 'Christian mystic,' should offer the potential for a Western audience to engage with what a prayerful act might entail,

[130] Phelan, 'Witnessing Shadows', pp. 573-4.

even if mysticism is not fully understood. It is not the use of Sufi in and of itself that I find problematic - but the constant use of examples that serve to make a performance exotic which can easily and profitably be framed by Western spiritual practices.

RoseLee Goldberg offers an example that hints at Christian practice but she does not contextualise it at all. She focuses on how the audience became participants throughout the work, once again commenting on examples highlighting spiritual aspects of the piece as well as the influence of the participants.

> While the performer followed no script—there was none, only a set of restrictions—random members of the audience became spontaneous players in this work. One young woman mimicked Abramović's movements with the precision of an understudy. A man held up a small drawing he had made of her, tinted gold, as in an offering to a saint.[131]

The use of the word mimic underscores that what the woman was doing was not real, was not the same as what Abramović was able to achieve. The implication is that the body alone is not enough; the woman used her body but was not able to transform her state of mind. The duality of metaphysics is at play here when Goldberg implies that to try to be like Abramović is to play act – to only represent.

The picture is also interesting given the historic role of icons in art. Goldberg introduces the image the man made as a picture offered to a 'saint.' Yet, as we have seen, icons contain presence and work against a simplistic reading of representation. Saints are also known for denying the physical and material needs of the body for food and comfort in their pursuit of God – both examples point to the kinds of understandings of the body in ritual that Cannell and Keane link to

[131] Goldberg, 'The Theater of the Body', p. 157.

repressed Christian influences in anthropological theory. However, one review in the *New York Times* did directly mention Christianity: "when viewers move close to the platforms, she stares down, directly into their eyes. The angle of sight recalls portrayals of the Crucifixion."[132] Other comments on the performance mention Egyptian formality, compare the furniture with sarcophagi and thrones and the gallery itself with a pilgrimage site.[133] The commentary leads no further and this review remains at the level of observation. From crucifixion to Egyptian art is a fairly large jump to make and yet it is not questioned or explained.

Another example of the uncritical use of language in documentation of the performance is provided by Phelan:

> Thomas McEvilley argues that Abramović's work 'is dedicated to preserving the traditional shamanic/yogic combination of ordeal, inspiration, therapy and trance'. Moreover, he astutely claims 'that this approach to performance art is both the most radically advanced – in its complete rejection of modernism and Eurocentrism – and most primitive – in its continuance of the otherwise discredited association of art with religion.'[134]

Besides the problematic use of term shamanic/yogic, McEvilley's claim that the performance is a 'rejection of modernism and Eurocentrism' makes me uneasy. The piece was, after all, performed by a European woman, to a predominantly white audience in New York City and written about almost exclusively by Western academics and artists. McEvilley said that Abramović had enough knowledge and expertise to 'preserve' traditions in which she had no cultural history, limited training, and to which she claimed no membership or long term observance. Both McEvilley and Phelan list forms of spiritual engagement which are neither part of their culture, nor part of Abramović's. Phelan uses McEvilley's

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[132] Roberta Smith, 'When Seeing is Not Only Believing, but Also Creating,' *New York Times*, 22 November 2002.
[133] Smith, 'When Seeing Is Not Only Believing.'
[134] Peggy Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 174.

writing to reference her own reading of the work, yet does not define any of the terms more specifically, nor ask whether he was accurate in his analysis. McEvilley claims that Abramović's piece was influenced by – and is an example of – 'universal' rituals that transcend cultural distinctions across centuries if not millennia, as well as simultaneously crediting her with creating a new phenomenon hitherto unimagined in the history of performance. This is similar to the problems discussed in relation to shamanism and New Age earlier in the chapter. Without actually calling the piece an ideal marriage of art and spirituality, it was accorded the status of something capable of 'saving' people.[135] Can it really be as old as the first people who expressed spirituality and radical enough to escape the bonds of cultural determination?

McEvilley also compares the piece directly with a vipassana retreat:

> *The House with the Ocean View* could be described as a meditation retreat made public. Specifically, it seems to have been based on what in the Pali tradition of Theravadin Buddhism is called a *vipassana* retreat. These retreats (which are given here and there around the world) usually last 10 to 12 days (Abramović chose 12), with no talking, reading or writing, and very limited eating; one can fast, as Abramović chose to do, or eat one meal at about noon every day.[136]

In his article McEvilley goes into detail about the Pali tradition and another Buddhist tradition of meditation, linking Abramović's work to both. In this quotation McEvilley indicates that Abramović did nothing but borrow an already existent meditation practice and put it in a gallery. The major change that she incorporated was looking directly at people, which would not normally be part of a silent retreat. Yet the overarching idea is that Abramović accomplished

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[135] Another writer who also referenced the idea of salvation was James Westcott, "She breathes deeply, turns her palms upward and tries again to float, like yesterday. In her mind I think she is floating. The audience reveres. This is how religions start. People are willing to believe in something, anything, anyone who offers some kind of sacrifice." James Westcott, 'Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View*: The View of the House from Some Drops in the Ocean', *The Drama Review*, 47 (T179) (2003), 129-136 (p. 134).

[136] McEvilley, Thomas, 'Performing the Present Tense', *Art in America*, April (2003), 114-117,153 (pp. 117, 153).

something quite incredible and unique.

This is the most thorough and convincing comparison of her work with any one spiritual practice that I read. Given, however, that even McEvilley chose to use a range of practices as points of comparison in his article I still find that something is missing. One might equally well think of the work in relation to Christian traditions: a twelve-day meditation, fasting and silence, recalls Christian retreats, monasticism and ascetic practices. The number twelve echoes the twelve days of Christmas, twelve disciples of Jesus and twelve tribes of Israel to name but a few. Abramović mentioned that twelve was important to her because the number three was a significant number and 1+2=3.[137] Again three is a number of importance in Christianity, not least because it is used for the trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. McEvilley was not wrong to explain something of vipassana, but where are the other comparisons to traditions closer to Western culture? The point is not that my analysis is more accurate or applicable than McEvilley's. I am making the point that *House* is just as open to interpretations that call on Christian logics as those of occidental practices.

In a section mentioned earlier, I questioned the use of both shamanism and Buddhism as a form of shorthand. I want to return to this quotation and focus on how Phelan linked spiritual practices with concepts of eternity:

> Abramović, who has been deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and shamanic wisdom from disparate traditions, learned during the early 1970s that the border crossing traversed within performances that work on the art/life divide might be seen as a kind of rehearsal for that other crossing, the one between life and death.[138]

There is nothing surprising in the idea that artists are interested in the themes of life and death, however, Phelan revealed some implicit assumptions about how

[137] "I am very much connected to the idea of three and in twelve, one and two make three. Three creates a triangle and there is tension in a triangle" (Abramović in Bajo).
[138] Phelan, 'On Seeing', p. 173.

belief is constructed. The concept of crossing from life to death supposes a certain kind of construction of the soul: that we have souls, that when we die our souls go somewhere else, and that life and death are separate stages of experience. The two spiritual practices included in the quotation are explicitly linked with life and death, but are not similar to each other in their understandings of life and death.

There is not room here for a detailed discussion of how Tibetan Buddhism approaches reincarnation or how the hundreds of types of shamanism deal with death and spirits, but neither set of practices assumes absolutely that a soul has one life and then passes on to eternity, as does Christianity. Neither assumes a mono-theistic God, or that the soul can have a personal relationship with a god, or that the soul is linked to an individual who will remain that individual for all eternity. The idea that a soul can cross from life to death implicitly carries within it the understanding, at least in the West, that the soul leaves the body and travels to heaven, hell, the universe in general or (in more recent history) just to nothingness. That Phelan used a phrase completely related to belief but did not more closely define how those differing belief systems operated in relation to life and death is an example of Pouillon's argument. He argued that Western language and religious history are intertwined such that the languages cannot but reproduce the logics of the Christian influence of the last two thousand years. To compare the practice of Western religion with any other forms, and to do so in a Western language, is therefore to risk blindly applying the logics of Christian spiritual practices.

## Conclusion

Where the 'Holy Images' of the pre-Renaissance period were created under specific conditions and assumed clear places in societal use, contemporary performance art is created autonomously. It is not part of any religious tradition. It is often understood as a fine art practice, i.e. as operating within the overarching category of art. However, performance scholars also claim it as part theatre/performance/installation/live art practice, specifically when it necessitates the live presence of either the artist's body or some other performer's body. Abramović departs from the traditions of Christian images themselves in that she does not try to show any major figures such as Jesus, the saints or Mary. Neither does she enact any stories from Christian heritage. Yet, this piece has aesthetic similarities with Christian art from previous centuries. It also attempts to engage participants in a manner comparable to that of a liturgy with a formal structure that demands durational embodied practices of repetition. There is a pattern to the nature of the performance of belief in the West.

The pattern of Western thought is also discernable in the ways in which people engage with artistic practice. Metaphysical structures, whether binary oppositions, or assumptions of a body/soul divide permeate the written accounts of the work. These tendencies are often paired with the use of examples from non-Western traditions that serve only to make exotic, or 'other' the performance. On closer inspection these methods of analysis are not the most relevant, and their use should at the very least be justified and contextualised. As we have seen in the analysis of liturgy, inherent in Christian thought is the insistence that the person is a whole and not just a body, and thus all experience are necessarily embodied. This information seems to have all but disappeared from contemporary

thought and needs to be re-inserted.

The audience reception theories show that both liturgy and performance art treat the participation of the 'audience' as a key element. The relationship between the facilitator and the participant is very similar in these two performance forms and more work should be done to analyse the specifics of how all present experience and perform the events. Of primary importance is the fact that corporate performative action is what enables these performances.

Western scholars are not only ignorant of the importance of embodied practice to Christian performance, they have almost lost the ability to read culturally specific Western references in performance art which is spiritual. When confronted with a piece like Abramović's which contains many convincing points of comparison it is almost as if a blind spot exists blocking out that which is most familiar. Or perhaps the Christian traditions have become so unfamiliar in contemporary Western societies that researchers are simply unaware of what they are watching. Either scenario needs to be rectified; we need to be aware of the history of our own traditions and how they continue to shape us today.

Yet, this dissertation is not about proving that all European art can be compared to aspects of Christian liturgy. I am interested in the ways in which Western understandings of the spiritual and religious, of ritual and art continue to shape how these practices are viewed, analysed and thus understood. If a critical framework unaware of its own Western biases frames all of the academic and critical evaluations of such practices then the kinds of analyses possible are severely limited. This case study serves to open up one topic in performance studies, namely belief, and questions long held assumptions about the neutrality of the discipline in relation to ritual and spiritual practices.

## CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with a question as to what constituted the performance of belief. This was paired with the claim that the performance of belief was misunderstood primarily because of a focus in the west on metaphysics and representational analyses. The path I have taken to support this claim has led from theoretical and philosophical discussions to case studies. Throughout, I have built upon my argument showing the disciplinary breadth that the study of belief requires. The philosophical and theological underpinnings of western culture were discussed through the work of Plato, Nietzsche, Derrida and Christian teachings. These highlighted the conflicting understandings of the body, mind and soul in western metaphysics. The fields of linguistics and anthropology were used to show how actions and language are interconnected: actions need words to articulate meaning and words also shape the kinds of actions that are used. The theoretical aspects were drawn together in a discussion of performative theory. Belief was shown to be relevant to linguistic, philosophical, physical and material analyses involving the theory of performativity and performative action.

The case studies of the Roman Catholic liturgy and Marina Abramović's performance art are the examples to which these theories were applied. Starting with the development of Christian liturgy, I argued that this is an important performance form in the western tradition which is not often examined in light of performance theory. I also used examples from liturgies that I attended to highlight the performative actions present in the liturgy. These actions speak to patterns and uses of embodied action which have long be used and practiced in western culture; they have taken on meanings beyond the liturgy itself. In the case study on performance art I first examined liturgical uses of art and then dealt

with the problems of weak comparisons to spiritual practices, i.e. shamanism and the New Age. In the analysis of Abramović's work I brought forward both a close examination of how Abramović views her own performances and the kinds of writing done by other academics and artists on her work. The close reading of responses to *The House With the Ocean View* is one example of how the layers of philosophical, theological, linguistic, anthropological and performance responses can be peeled back to highlight the structure of the performance of western belief.

To bring the dissertation to a close, this section formally compares and discusses the case studies in the context of the thesis overall. To facilitate this discussion I have chosen headings that enable comparisons between the philosophical/theoretical discussions and the examples of embodied performance. These headings are: rhythm & structure; meanings & content; engagement; and participants. There is overlap between the categories which further strengthens the overall argument for the performative nature of belief.

### RHYTHM & STRUCTURE

Rhythm underlays both the liturgy and Abramović's *The House With the Ocean View*. It is one of the most obvious similarities between the two performances. The liturgy is built on long and short rhythms; the long ones include yearly, monthly, weekly and daily rhythms and the short ones are contained by the performance itself, e.g. alternating between singing and Bible readings, and call and response. The rhythms of speech are also an important aspect that links back to the kind of work done by Pouillon, Ruel and their colleagues. When listening to the liturgy in Czech I was able to pick out specific prayers, and sections of text, because of the rhythm. All European languages translated the liturgy from Latin

into the vernacular and the rhythms of Latin have shaped the sound of all contemporary liturgies. The understanding of the liturgical texts is not simply accomplished through words; the rhythms of the texts, as they are apprehended by the ear and felt by the body when spoken, also create meanings for the participant.

In *House* rhythms are set by Abramović on the first day of the performance and are focussed specifically on her interactions with the objects and people in the space. Some examples of the rhythms she establishes are the movements of the objects and her patterning of actions so that each time she dresses or showers or sits down to watch people it is done in the same order. She emphasizes rhythm through the use of a metronome, and the opening hours of the gallery make overt the rhythm that extends throughout the performance. While these rhythms only existed for the time that she was present in the space it has been noted by all who wrote about the piece that participants who came to the gallery either copied Abramović's rhythms or changed their own daily rhythms to be able to visit the gallery frequently during the twelve days. *House* engendered a rhythm for Abramović as well as for those who witnessed the event.

The structure of the liturgy is evident in its textual form which is annotated and reviewed on a regular basis. The Roman Catholic Church's approach to the organic development of the liturgy promotes a structure that can respond to theological and cultural needs. This includes theological structures that introduce the Christian story of belief. The biblical narrative of what happened to Jesus is recounted during each liturgy both by the facilitator during the Eucharist and by the participants in the creed. At the centre of liturgical action is the reiteration of Jesus' recasting of Jewish ritual. The liturgy also includes

statements of belief and key prayers; the communal structures through which the participants engage with the belief.

*House* is also tightly structured, but this is not linked to a pre-existing text. Although the video of the event has been used to produce a text that catalogues all the actions that happened over the twelve days it is not a performance script to be copied. To reproduce the event in the same spirit as Abramović it would be necessary to use her structure of time and space, but not to memorise and reproduce her movements. If she is seen as a facilitator of an experience, in the same vein as the priest, then it is her presence and contact with the participants that is important, and not her exact actions. The actions have not been codified over time and taught, so they do not have the same resonance as those from the liturgy. They are still capable of eliciting responses from those who attend, especially those who come every day and become acquainted with the liturgical action.

The liturgy is also shaped in such a way that it reflects how salvation functions as a structural principle in Western discourse. As discussed in the beginning, both in relation to Plato and to Hebraic thought, the intelligible place (for Plato) or heaven (for the Jews) is intangible. God or the Good is outside of our understanding. People believe in things that they cannot see and it is through practices such as liturgy that the body can be trained to apprehend the divine. The structure of the liturgy reminds the participants that they are engaged in an activity which brings them into contact with the unseen divine. It trains the entire person to seek experiences of the divine through every aspect of their being.

### MEANINGS & CONTENT

How meaning is created and understood by the participant of a performance has been a major theme throughout this dissertation. The association of meaning to an event or an object is, as we have seen, both learned over time and also unique to the participant. Each individual manipulates the symbolic system both inside and outside of the institutional frame (as per Hanegraaff). Examples of manipulation inside the frame include the foot-washing in the liturgy, while an example from outside would be the Beranek cake. In Abramović's performance the participants who signed up to 'dream' in the room next to hers manipulated from within the frame. The person who brought hand made images to show and give to Abramović was manipulating the symbolic system from outside. Although it could be argued that Abramović did not officially identify her work with an institutional frame, the performance was nonetheless held at a high profile art gallery. She also subjects the work to oversight and tightly controls the use of her work by others.

I have focussed on performative meanings and how these come into being. Although I have avoided a detailed representational analysis much of the meaning taught to and understood by the participants relies on representation. Performative understandings arise whether representative ones are known or not, as in the example of the participant who happens by a church or a performance art piece and decides to stop and watch. For the passer-by many meanings need to be made in the moment, as there is little or no foreknowledge of the unexpected event. For the regular participant the representative meanings work alongside the performative and can even spur new meanings.

Regular participants in the Roman Catholic liturgy and those who often go to performance art know what is expected both in terms of the content they

interact with and the meanings they receive. Perhaps details might be different from one church to another in terms of exactly where communion is taken, or where people normally sit within the building, and no two pieces of performance by Abramović will be the same, yet there are norms which are learned and expected. Deviation from these can disrupt the event and lead to uncertainty about whether the performance was properly executed. During an unexpected disturbance to either the liturgy or a performance art event the facilitator would be stopped, at least momentarily, from maintaining the rhythm, and following the structure. Participant focus would be drawn to the unstructured element that does not correspond to the meanings and content that are known or expected. Yet, this is not the only possible outcome if there is a disturbance. The unexpected can also add layers of meaning that create new and positive connections for those involved. This is part of the nature of the performative moment - it is necessary to be there because the event requires participation to exist and each iteration is unique.

Content in both kinds of events is preset and changeable. Elements which are preset in the liturgy include prayers, linking actions, and physical engagements of the participants. In Abramović's pieces the objects are preset, styles of interaction are dictated and long lengths of time are provided to performer and participant. What is changeable in the liturgy includes music, prayers of the people, seasonal requirements and the people who come to participate. In *House* Abramović herself changed significantly from the beginning to the end as she lost weight and grew used to the imposed rhythms of life in the gallery. The people who came also changed the performance during each day and from day to day. What is hard to gauge in both situations is the awareness of

participants to changes in content. Some elements would be immediately perceived as missing from the liturgy, e.g. leaving out a section. However, since some prayers change weekly it is unlikely that anyone would notice if one wrong prayer was read on a given week. For *House* there are similarly aspects which would be glaring and others which would not be noticed. And in both cases there is the unexpected content, such as the shower not working during one of the twelve days of *House*, or a microphone not working during the liturgy.

Content is both absolutely necessary and also very malleable. How participants engage with content is vital because this is the main way in which meanings, both representational and performative are created. In relation to the performance of belief content can seem mundane, because it is repetitive, and yet it is exactly such repetition which can lead people to use adjectives such as transcendent and spiritual. The meaning behind each of these words is used to describe both the planned content and the unplanned content of the event. The words describe the experience of the participant and this experience is evaluated based on the facilitation of rhythm, structure, meanings and content: the entirety of the event.

### PARTICIPANTS

I made the case earlier that liturgy and performance art have more in common than might initially be thought based upon the kinds of participation that happen in each. While comparisons are traditionally made between the liturgy and theatre or drama, and between performance art and theatre or installations, these comparisons do not reflect the nature of the interaction between facilitator and participant. Audiences are not as passive as was thought (or at least asserted) for

many years. Philosophical and theoretical contributions from Helen Freshwater, Gay McAuley and Jacques Rancière demonstrate that the conception of audience passivity is changing. My analysis of performative action is another example of how performance theory can rethink traditional roles of active and passive and recast the nature of the action in the space.

The liturgy and *House* only succeed through facilitated participation. Those who are in the space, clergy, congregation, artist and gallery visitors are embedded in and responsible for the action. In the case of the liturgy the ritual must be enacted in order to happen and the ideal is that those participating feel facilitated in their contributions. This facilitation is characterized by embodied demands made on the entire person to listen, respond and take action.

In the liturgy this is achieved through the use of objects and actions that take the person through a series of encounters. These include touching metal, wood, paper (flipping pages), shaking hands, eating, being sprinkled with water, smelling incense, sitting, kneeling, standing, speaking, reciting from memory, engaging in call and response, praying silently and praying aloud in a group. The entire group perform the same actions (or almost all of the same actions, as some people may not be able to, for example, kneel). The senses are not called upon in isolation – while being sprinkled with water people can also hear the sound of the object used, hear the ripple of the robes of the priest, see people moving as they are hit with water, etc. While the priest and lay people visibly lead the liturgy the congregation know the performance. The blessing of the Eucharist and the absolution of sin cannot be performed by anyone but the priest (the sanctioned and trained person). Excepting these actions (because practising Catholics would

not think it appropriate to enact these) most members of the congregation could step in and facilitate the saying of prayers and call and response if necessary.

People congregate for performances of belief, and while participants are so familiar with the actions that they could repeat them anywhere, they are unlikely to do so anywhere but, e.g. in the church building at the appointed time. As previously mentioned, the performative nature of the liturgy dictates that the correct people, with the proper intention, at the appointed time, with the sanctioned leaders perform the liturgy. To return to Searle's explanation of performative utterances, infelicitous performatives do not allow for the action to be fulfilled (even if I break a bottle over the hull of a ship and say the appropriate sentence for a christening, I do not have the power to christen a ship). In the same way, there are certain liturgical actions which are allowed to happen in the church (because the space is consecrated) and others that cannot. The participants interact with the space as the frame for their performance as they manipulate symbolic systems.

In *House* the facilitation happens through Abramović's presence in the space. She manipulates the symbolic system that she has created as an example for those who participate. Participation happens by being present at the exhibit and specifically through engaging with Abramović by holding her gaze. Both holding Abramović's gaze and being present require a certain type of attention that is not achieved through a few minutes standing in the space. The facilitation includes taking those present through a series of encounters. As Abramović does not speak these include the sounds of her body moving in the space, the sound of the metronome, or furniture moving and of her taking a shower. Anyone who stays for more than a few minutes has to stand or sit for long periods of time. Any

loud, fast or unexpected movements of participants would be easily noticed. Sounds other than those made by Abramović would be easily categorised as 'extra' or accepted as part of the nature of such a public event. People experience the space by sitting on a hard floor or leaning up against the wall, standing near others when it is full or far away from others when it is empty. Abramović is the example that stands out and as people watch her they become aware of the stresses she has placed herself under. Many become completely absorbed in the performance and many senses are activated: people stand or sit, whisper, smell others in the room, feel the humidity of water after the shower, and hear the metronome. As a few of the reviews/articles mentioned, people worried about Abramović falling, that she looked tired, or they became so involved when they made eye contact with her that they lost all track of time.

Part of Abramović's aim, as she articulates it, was to be completely present to the moment, fully available to the people in the room. She credits those who came with making the piece with her and for breaking down the divide between performer and audience. She wanted to change her own awareness and through this other people's awareness, or to open them up to experiences that they might never otherwise have had. As the many articles attest to, people found the piece moving, transformative and very personal. People often returned more than once because they experienced the unexpected and ineffable in the space.

In *House* her demonstration of embodied action was the trigger for other people to use such activities in their daily lives. There is more to the facilitation than simply looking at Abramović, as the performance requires that people spend enough time in the space to become aware of the demands on her entire person. Abramović is strained physically and mentally by living in the space and the

restrictions she has made on herself. Those who enter become aware of the difference between her state and the states of everyone else in the space.

In the liturgy developments in action echo, to some degree, the developments in language and rituals over time. Language feeds into the creation of actions and actions require new language to articulate changes. Does something similar happen with performance practices? There is much to show that Abramović is always trying to find new ways to articulate her beliefs about the power of embodied action. She has taken more and more to publishing over the years and controlling the documentation of her pieces. Yet, she relies primarily on her pieces in order to communicate. She allows others to find the words or to respond with actions of their own. It might seem as though liturgical changes take a very long time when compared with performance practices. Yet, Abramović has been working for forty years and her pieces have continued to lengthen, to rely more and more on audience presence and to incorporate more reiterative elements. These two performance styles have more in common in terms of participation than might at first glance be discernible.

### ENGAGEMENT

The other elements already discussed – rhythm and structure, meaning and content, and participants – all contribute to engagement. There is individual and group engagement and both of these are active in any performance situation. Many groupings are possible, such as young, old, men, women, how people are dressed, or even how tall they are and thus how much they can see from where they are sitting or standing. Needless to say, from one moment to another any person in the room will be more or less engaged in what is happened depending

on what is going on around them and what has already happened to them that day. As discussed by Helen Freshwater what actually goes on between all the people present for a performance is much more intricate than has historically been acknowledged. As audiences cannot be thought of as unified or stable a performative approach is very useful. A performative analysis takes each moment as it happens and examines what elements are/were at play. What is happening as people enter, as they find seats, talk to others, as the performance begins, etc.

Engagement is dependent on so many personal factors and it is impossible to tell the level to which each person present is able to focus on what they are watching/participating in. However, one benefit of the use of a performative approach is that being present is part of the qualification for the event taking place. Those present in the space for the duration of the liturgy were part of its accomplishment even if they were thinking about the rest of their day instead of the event. The nature of liturgical action, that is, the fact that it can be memorised, is part of what is interesting when examining the nature of performative action. Engagement is required to learn the form – the rhythms, structure, meaning and content. This is seen throughout the examples from the liturgy that we have looked at in this dissertation. I have shown that the people present did engage with their bodies. I found myself being caught up in their actions, aware of their directed energy, aware when they relaxed or when they were intent on finishing something. Often times I had no idea what it was that they were actually doing, but they were reciting something, or obviously praying or meditating about something which was evident from their postures. The same kinds of reports are evident in the articles and essays about *House*. Embodied engagement can be observed.

A key element of the engagement with a piece is the role of the facilitator. In the liturgy the priest has to be there. It is not a sanctioned liturgy that complies with the necessary elements if the priest is not present. Similarly Abramović must also be there in order for the event to take place. However, in both cases there are elements to the performance which do not require these people, and further demonstrate the engagement of the participants. The cake baking of the Beranek is a liturgical element, and a performative one, that does not require the presence of the priest. As well, participants in *House* can take the concept home with them and use objects as meditation triggers. If they chose to commit to the concept of the piece they can continue to meditate on changing their energy fields and eventually the energy of the city (this was one of the goals of the piece as articulated by Abramović). In these ways they are continuing the work but in a way that does not require her facilitation.

Engagement in a performative event also entails the use of the props, objects, and material practices. Just thinking through the ideas that are part of a performance is not enough. Even while meditating in a seated position or praying in a church pew, the entire person is involved. Sitting still for hours becomes its own challenge and is an intensely physical action. Praying while maintaining stillness is a physical and material practice that involves the entire person. This kind of embodied engagement unites physical and mental engagements if only for a few seconds or moments. This state does not have to remain the same in order for the event to take place, or to have been participated in. Moment to moment is how the performative is achieved; the participation of all is part of how the event unfolds. Otherwise it would not be possible to count the participation of the non-

initiated in the event; those people who happen upon the gallery and come in and watch have been part of what is going on.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All of these points of comparison serve to answer the question "What is the performance of belief? As I claimed at the beginning, belief is instantiated and manifested through embodied practices that engage the entire person. The discussion of this idea has taken an interdisciplinary approach through philosophical ideas and examples from case studies. In each section, whether on historical, philosophical, theological, or cultural positions and practices, the outcome of the research has been a focus on embodied practices. Belief has been shown to be culturally specific and this investigation has taken an in depth look at Christian logics. Through this dissertation the question has become not one of whether belief is a relevant category of research, but how and in what manner. Belief and its performance is a major topic in philosophy. This statement may seem surprising, but whether or not they use the term performance, every thinker I have discussed has established a critical position based on the presumption that they know something about the conditions of belief and experiences involved therein. This dissertation has contributed to an understanding of belief as implicated not only in the metaphysical, but just as completely in physical and material practices. The Western performance of belief in liturgical and artistic practices is embodied and dynamic.

## APPENDIX A

The following is a brief listing of the actions in each part. These are annotated to explain the function of the action; I have not included a full description of possible theological meanings and associations. A full description of a Mass that I attended is found in Chapter 3, along with more information about the meanings connected with the actions in that particular Mass.

Roman Catholic Liturgy:
Introductory Rites
This section of the service starts with all those attending seated in pews which normally face the altar (sometimes choir pews face each other). The clergy, choir and all those facilitating the service begin at the back of the church or in a side room so that they can then process into the main body of the church and to the altar during the first hymn. Some elements, such as the sign of the cross, happen throughout the service at pre-determined times. These times are learned through attendance. Other elements, such as the collect, are always changing depending on the time of year and other aspects of church life.

Hymn – the procession of the cross, candles, incense, clergy, bible, altar servers, and choir happens at this point
Sign of the cross – priest invokes the trinity and all cross themselves
Opening prayers – said by the priest
Greeting – call/response, call by the priest and response from the participants, this formally establishes the presence of God and the community as a group
Act of Penitence – confession and absolution (although another rite is used for full absolution of sins outside of the liturgy)
Kyrie – asking for mercy, this is sung by choir and participants
Gloria in Excelsis Deo – hymn sung by choir, or all, praising God
Silence – the length of this is determined by the priest
Collect – prayer which changes every day of the year

Liturgy of the Word
This section is mostly focussed on the readings from the Bible and the sermon. In some ways it is the most recognizable for people not familiar with the form because it involves listening to text and a short lecture on a topic. Most often the sermon is closely related to one of the readings.

Readings – either two or three (when three are used one is from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and the last one is always from one of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) depending on the service (during Easter this fluctuates greatly: one service has eight readings and eight psalms)

Bible reading – all stand, thus giving focus to the reading, learning, listening. The reading is meant to instruct and provide material for the sermon/homily.
Psalm – this is led by the choir, and can either be participatory, call and response, or a time of silent reflection for the congregation
Alleluia – all stand and sing together before the Gospel reading
Gospel – all stand and face the reader/priest if the priest has moved into the centre of the church with the Bible (which is common). This is generally used as the inspiration for the sermon.

Sermon/homily – instruction and reflection as a community (while one aim of the sermon is to clarify the faith, many weeks one verse or theme is explored in detail meaning that a person attending on only one occasion would receive a specific and perhaps politically weighted message).
Creed – Nicene or Apostles' – both are affirmations of faith
Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful) – focus of the group on issues of relevance in the group, the town, the country, and the world. There is often a response to each section of the prayers such as "Lord hear our prayer"
Offering – a song accompanies the collecting of money.[1]

<u>Liturgy of the Eucharist</u>
In this section there is a lot of action to watch at the altar as objects are brought out and arranged. The objects are used to highlight the retelling of the Last Supper Jesus had with his followers.

Eucharistic Rite starts – bringing of objects (wine, bread, chalice, paten) to the alter
Prayer – formal beginning of this section
Call and response text – starts the text which includes the retelling of what Jesus did when he started the ritual on the night before he died
Sanctus – invokes the eternal celebration of the liturgy, after this point all generally kneel until the peace is shared
Consecration – formal blessing of the bread and wine at which point transubstantiation of the elements takes place and they become the body and blood of Christ.[2]

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[1] The Bible teaches the giving of 10% of income to the church/organisations.
[2] This is the official teaching of the Catholic Church. Other churches and other times in history have viewed this differently.

The Communion Rite

This section involves the most movement on the part of the congregation who leave their pews both to shake hands with those around them as well as to receive communion at various points around the church. The speaking of the Lord's prayer also happens in this part of the service which is among the most well known texts of the Christian tradition.

Lord's prayer
Peace – shaking of hands and speaking "Peace be with you." Contact and acknowledgment of all in the space
Agnus Dei – affirmation of Jesus who takes away sin and gives peace
Call and response – preparation to take communion
Taking of communion – every week the bread is eaten, on special occasions wine is drunk as well
Prayer – different prayer each time to close this section of the service

Concluding Rite

This section is short and often followed by music on the organ as people sit quietly and meditate or pray.

Announcements – plans the group has for itself
Blessing – encouragement and affirmation of the group to affect and effect the world. "Go in peace" is a typical blessing.
Final hymn – the recession of the priest and all those who processed at the beginning. Often the final hymns have a focus on the life outside of the spiritual group.

## Appendix B

*In Between*

Part I Without Public

Performance

A. I sit on a chair talking to the camera as if I were the public.
B. I lie on a table performing.
1. Tracing the lines on my open palm with a sharp needle.
2. Pricking my middle finger with a sharp needle.
3. Smearing blood over my finger with a needle.
4. Helper holding the needle very close above my wide open eye tracing the veins.
5. Tracing the moles on my neck with a sharp needle.

Part II With Public

Before entering the space the audience is asked to sign an agreement to spend 40 minutes inside the video installation without leaving. Before entering blindfolds and headphones have been given to them.

On their way out each of them is given a certificate, in which the artist thanks them for their time and trust. Without fulfilling these conditions, the work cannot be seen.[1]

Soundtrack

Sit on the chair. Put your headphones on. Make sure that your clothes are loose and comfortable. Take off your shoes, glasses and jewelry [sic]. Loosen your belt. Put the blindfold over your eyes. Listen to my voice. Now turn your head very slowly to the left. Then turn it slowly back to the middle, and just as slowly to the right. Feel your neck relax. Now slowly come back to the center. Listen to my voice. Your whole body should now be very comfortable. Feel the chair pressing against you. Sense how warm or cold your body feels. Feel the texture of your clothes against your skin. Feel your skin. Now shift your attention to your feet. Make sure both feet are firmly touching the ground. Feel the floor supporting you. Take a deep breath right now and exhale. Again, a deep full breath. Exhale. Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Feel your chest gently rise and fall with each breath, establishing a smooth rhythm. Now I will count for you. One, breathe in. Breathe out. Two, breathe in. Breathe out. Three,

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[1] Marina Abramović, *Artist Body* (Milan: Charta, 1998), p. 348. This was performed in 1996 in Dallas Texas and in Macedonia in 1997.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Four, Breathe in. Breathe out. Five, Breathe in. Breathe out. Six, Breathe in. Breathe out, Seven, Breathe in. Breathe out, Eight, Breathe in. Breathe out, Nine, Breathe in. Breathe out, Ten, Breathe in. Breathe out, Eleven, Breathe in. Breathe out, Twelve, Breathe in. Breathe out, Now just continue to let your breath flow naturally in and out following your own rhythm. Listen to my voice. Now feel again the presence of the chair and your body pressing against it. Feel your feet touching the floor. Feel. Slowly, very slowly, raise your hand and take your blindfold off. Keep your eyes closed for a few moments. Feel, the space around you. Smell the smells around you. Take one more deep breath. Slowly open your eyes. Take a few moments to examine your surroundings. Let your awareness gradually take in more and more of your environment. Use all of your senses. Observe. Take a deep breath. In and out. Slowly start to focus on the screen. Look. Focus your mind in the here and now. We are coming to the end of the journey. Slowly blink your eyes. Slowly Shift your feet and extend your legs in front of you. Continue to stretch and breathe. Now, slowly sit upright and take one more deep relaxed breath. Slowly stand up, remove your headphones. Go.[2]

[2] Soundtrack for *In Between* (1996) by Marina Abramović, in *Ninety: art des années 90 / Art in the 90's*. (Paris: Eighty Publications, 1999), p. 33. Also in *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milan: Charta, 1998), pp. 350-1.

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